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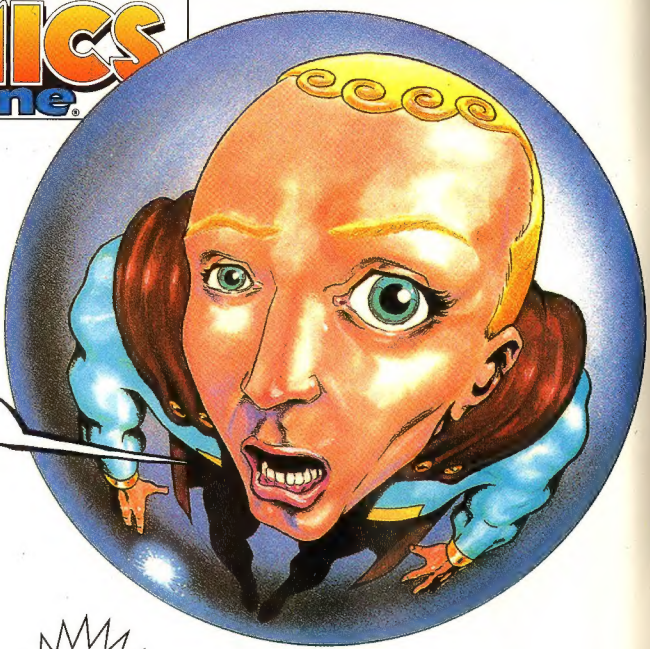

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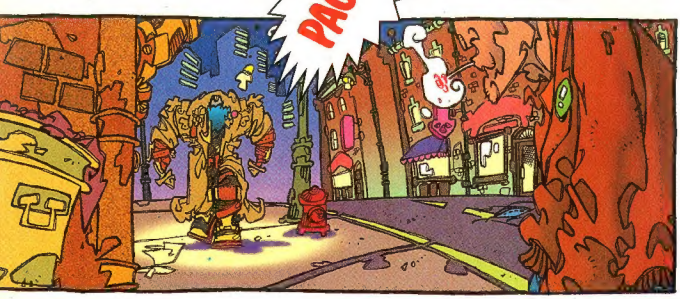

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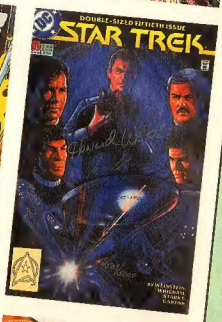

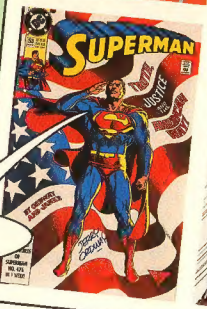

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WORD BALLOONS

Roll Them Stones

It is a very hot day, the Sun beating down without mercy. Seeking refuge from the relentless heat, every living thing on that African plain is hidden in shadows—all but two. There, picking curiously through the litter of past and present, are two scientists, the men who discovered what may be the first human, "Lucy."

They are Donald Johanson and Tom Gray, looking again for something old. And then, Johanson spies it. There, just out of the corner of his eye—proof of mankind's existence long before Lucy, of a civilization not all that different from our own, of a reality that just *has* to have been real.

It's the sign that says "Welcome to Bedrock."

That's my fantasy, you know, whenever I read all those scientific treatises about the first humans (books of which I'm inordinately fond). Somehow, the "facts" of human existence then fold into the "fictions" associated with a stone-age family that I first encountered while watching television more than 30 years ago. It's a dream, you see. I want the Flintstones to be *real*.

And this summer, they are.

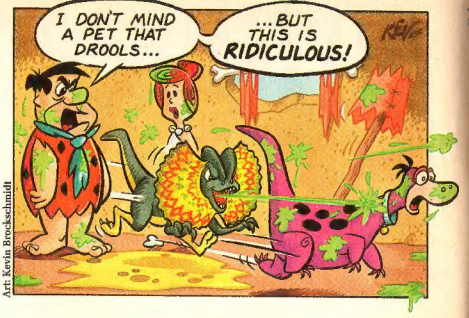
The Flintstones, of course, were created in 1960—fashioned by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera as a sort of prehistoric *Honeymooners*. At the time, Hanna and Barbera were already the stewards of a burgeoning TV animation empire which included *Huckleberry Hound* and *Yogi Bear*, but it's *The Flintstones* that, to me at least, cemented them as touchstones of cartoon childhood.

Yes, OK, *The Honeymooners* is a TV classic, but *The Flintstones* were, well, nicer people. Fred was somehow more lovable than Ralph Kramden on his very best day—there's no question about it. Barney was smarter than Ed Norton (but then, who *wouldn't* be?). And Wilma and Betty? They never seemed quite so shrewish as Alice and Trixie. *The Honeymooners* offered a household filled with comedic contempt leavened by love—whereas the Flintstones and the Rubbles, they could never really *hate* anyone. And *The Flintstones*, after all, were much more *animated* than *The Honeymooners*. But then, they would be, wouldn't they?

Bringing these caveman characters to life were a quartet of voiceover veterans, trained in vaudeville and on radio: Alan Reed (as Fred), Mel Blanc (Barney), Bea Benaderet (Betty) and Jean VanderPyl (Wilma). (Sadly, only VanderPyl is still alive and voicing her character.) Successors included Henry Corden (Fred), Frank Welker and others (Barney) and Gerry Autterson and others (Betty).

So, I'm pleased to direct your attention to COMICS SCENE YEARBOOK #3 (on sale June 14). There, we've collected three classic *Flintstones* interviews—with Blanc, VanderPyl and Corden—alongside all-new looks at Reed, Benaderet, Welker and the others. I love having all these *Flintstones* folks together in *one* edition just as the live-action *Flintstones* movie (the reason for all this hoopla) hits theaters.

Seems like they've been talking about a live-action *Flintstones* since the dawn of time. (There was even a story on it seven years ago in CS #1). At one point, John Belushi's name was mentioned as Fred (the late actor was also talked up at the time to play a live-action Alley Oop, based on the caveman comic strip). That, of course, didn't happen. Still, it seems as if John Goodman was *born* to play Fred Flintstone, heading a cast that includes Elizabeth Perkins, Rosie O'Donnell and Rick Moranis (another incredibly nice guy).



Art: Kevin Brockschmidt

Marc Shapiro wandered around the set to file a prehistoric overview of the FX-laden comedy (see page 30). For Toy Fair a few months ago, Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment actually brought part of the set to New York—erecting it in a Manhattan armory so that we attendees could truly say we had been to Bedrock.

And yes, it's a very impressive place, that prehistoric city (and the built-from-scratch, fabulously faithful sets). What's strange is the cartoon civilization that depends on *The Flintstones*' box-office survival. Live-action movie versions of Harvey's *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and *Richie Rich* are already underway, but other Hanna-Barbera creations remain in limbo, despite attempts over the years to bring reality to *Tom & Jerry*, *The Jetsons* and *Scooby-Doo*. If *The Flintstones* rocks and rolls into success, other Toons will follow—perhaps *Jonny Quest*, *Secret Squirrel*, even *Magilla Gorilla*.

It's true, you see. Upon *The Flintstones* rests the fate of a virtual cartoon civilization and their eventual evolution from animation to actualization.

So, be a paleontologist for just a moment, and examine your surroundings. There, just out of the corner of your eye, the discovery awaits. It's at theater near you. Welcome to Bedrock.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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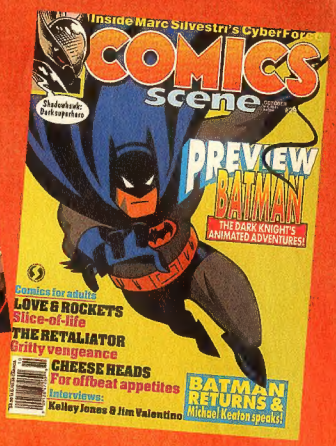

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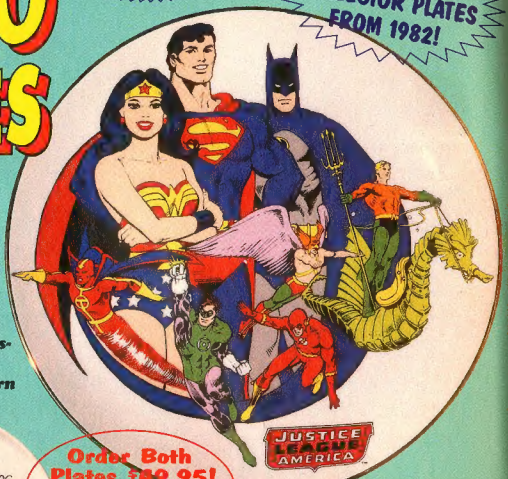

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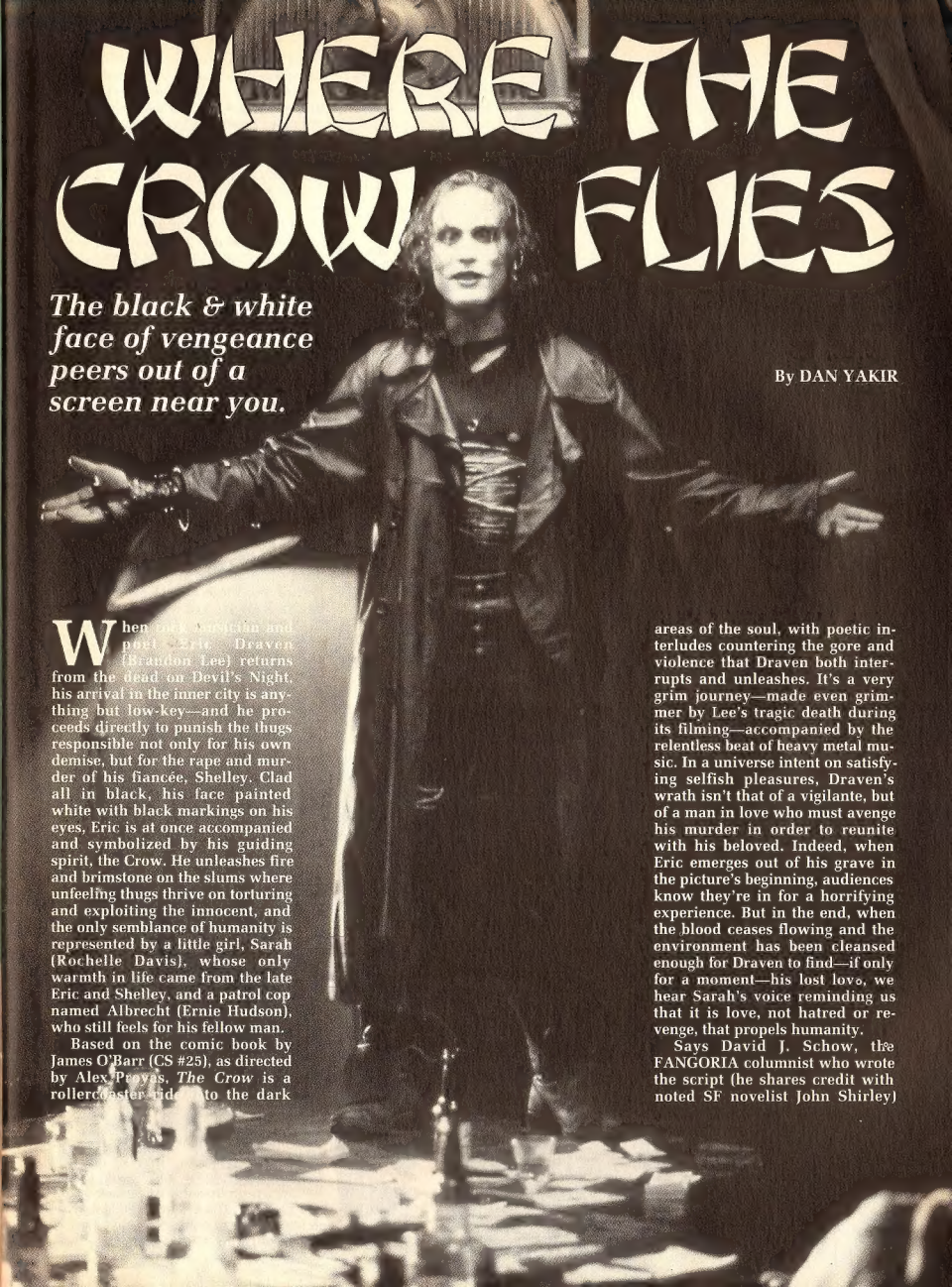
WHERE THE CROW FLIES

The black & white face of vengeance peers out of a screen near you.

By DAN YAKIR



When rock musician and poet Eric Draven (Brandon Lee) returns from the dead on Devil's Night, his arrival in the inner city is anything but low-key—and he proceeds directly to punish the thugs responsible not only for his own demise, but for the rape and murder of his fiancée, Shelley. Clad all in black, his face painted white with black markings on his eyes, Eric is at once accompanied and symbolized by his guiding spirit, the Crow. He unleashes fire and brimstone on the slums where unfeeling thugs thrive on torturing and exploiting the innocent, and the only semblance of humanity is represented by a little girl, Sarah (Rochelle Davis), whose only warmth in life came from the late Eric and Shelley, and a patrol cop named Albrecht (Ernie Hudson), who still feels for his fellow man.

Based on the comic book by James O'Barr (CS #25), as directed by Alex Proyas, *The Crow* is a rollercoaster ride into the dark areas of the soul, with poetic interludes countering the gore and violence that Draven both interrupts and unleashes. It's a very grim journey—made even grimmer by Lee's tragic death during its filming—accompanied by the relentless beat of heavy metal music. In a universe intent on satisfying selfish pleasures, Draven's wrath isn't that of a vigilante, but of a man in love who must avenge his murder in order to reunite with his beloved. Indeed, when Eric emerges out of his grave in the picture's beginning, audiences know they're in for a horrifying experience. But in the end, when the blood ceases flowing and the environment has been cleansed enough for Draven to find—if only for a moment—his lost love, we hear Sarah's voice reminding us that it is love, not hatred or revenge, that propels humanity.

Says David J. Schow, the FANGORIA columnist who wrote the script (he shares credit with noted SF novelist John Shirley)

Nevermore will vengeance lie unresolved beneath the earth, for the Crow flies this night and the guilty are not safe.

Crow Characters Copyright 1989, 1991 James O'Barr

"We were working off pencils of the final issue—before the comic book was even finished—and we ourselves had no idea how it was going to end. Little did we know that we were about to do 14 more drafts as ideas came up and as Brandon Lee got involved. I was contacted on this because someone had read my fiction, and saw in that the prose values they wanted to translate to the screen. My work was very appropriate for *The Crow*, which is very dark and Gothic and *film noir*-like—and incredibly violent. All those capacities, to one degree or another, are embodied in my two novels and short story collections."

According to Schow, he was in sync with the director and producer as to what the movie would be about. The challenge, he says, "was dealing with someone else's material—how faithful do you remain to it, and how much of yourself do you inject into it? I had no problem with the action in the movie being so exaggerated. Movies *are* exaggeration. They are reality with pacing and punchlines and subplots and everything happening on time, unlike real life. The problem was getting the tone—staying true to the comic book, which is fairly dark and emotional and fairly intimate to the character—and portraying these events on film in an unflinching kind of way."

Schow sees the violence and the lyricism in *The Crow* as "flip sides of the same thing. Internally, we're all incredibly violent as a species, so the thing about movies and comics in particular is that internal thing that's externalized in physical action: someone cuts you off on the freeway and you want to kill him. Sometimes, in its lowest form, the violence is a power fantasy, but in its highest form, it's an empowerment—'What if I *did* have the power to do this?'

"In the case of *The Crow*," he continues, "what if this horrible tragedy befell me and I actually had the chance to come back and redress the whole situation a year later? Every movie ever made is a fantasy, because we're all playing that 'what if' game.

"What the comic book and the movie have in common is that Eric Draven is a man who returns from the dead—comes up out of the grave to avenge his own death and his fiancee's. In the movie, it's a year after his death, on the anniversary of Devil's Night, the eve the city burns. In Detroit, every year on the night before Halloween, several hundred fires are set; this is not part of the comic, but it's part of the backdrop that we decided to set the story against. It involves Eric's growing cognizance of his own past, because he comes out of the grave a blank slate and acquires memories, in flashback form, of what became of him. Concurrent with that,

he gets his sense of mission with the help of a crow which he follows and through whose eyes he can see. He discovers various things, such as his ability to not be wounded, to take hard falls off high buildings, absorb bullets, deflect knives—all of which will serve him in his mission to get the guys who killed him the year before.

"That's more or less the mission in the comic, but we wanted to develop every character in the comic and create some new ones, such as the living people with whom Eric gets involved, like Sarah and Albrecht, and try to define what their relationships were like before Eric died and how that was important to him when he returns. If you had to leave these people, and then had a chance to come back and redress whatever was not in balance when you were alive, and had two days to do it, how would you proceed? Would you even accept this past at all? The incentive we give Eric to accept the job of the vendetta is the promise of a reunion with his fiancée in whatever hereafter lies beyond.

"Eric Draven is not just a hero in the sense that he's not as bad as the bad guys. He's a hero in the sense that Clint Eastwood is a hero in the spaghetti Westerns—because his emotional agenda is very *pure*. He can be amoral sometimes, but I think his heart is in the right place. What drives Eric on his quest is the overpowering tragedy and senselessness of what happened to his fiancée and him. The relationship he had with Shelley in the middle of this bleak urban environment was one of the small points of light in this environment, and it got snuffed out unfairly—because the universe is an unfair place. He has the chance to come back and redress that, and because his heart is pure, and he has the motives of the best heroes of all classical fiction, I think he *is* a hero."

Director Alex Proyas was tapped to transform the bizarre Gothic nightmares of James O'Barr's cult comic book into an equally haunting film.

All Crow Photos: Robert Zuckerman/Miramax Films

Albrecht (Ernie Hudson) and Sarah (Rochelle Davis) both feel the passing, or is it the coming, of *The Crow*.

When Eric goes on his mission, he realizes that he can't eliminate evil without interacting with innocents. Although propelled by the dead, Eric must take account of the living, of Sarah, whose mother Darla is only interested in doing drugs and hanging out at the Pit, the grunge bar that serves as the villains' meeting place (until Draven straightens her out, thereby affirming Shelley's role as a substitute mother).

Sarah is the only one who visits Eric's grave, as if she were calling him to come back. "Also," adds the screenwriter, "if you subscribe at all to the idea that you keep dead friends and loved ones alive in your mind by remembering them, she is the *only* one who makes the gesture, and therefore makes it even more appropriate for him to come back. What makes Eric and Shelley special is not just their love, but that they are remembered, that there was a horrible tragedy, an almost random event of violence that need not have happened in the midst of all this but did. It's the unfairness of it; if you accept that things are cosmically balanced and you have a hereafter that awaits beyond death, then for Eric to return at this time for this mission is very appropriate."

Schow concedes that it took a while to figure out Draven's resurrection. "It went from being ethereal—he floats up through the turf and is just there—to an actual physical, labored crawling out of the grave in the best horror movie tradition. We decided that Eric crawling out of the grave is a parody of birth, so when he crawls out he's still wearing his funeral suit, he's all muddy, he's soaked, and he doesn't remember anything. After a year in limbo, and not being reunited with his fiancée in the hereafter, the physical shock of being back in the living world really tosses him. He needs to find out what he's doing, to learn why he's there, how he got there. And the crow is in the cemetery in the beginning, so he follows it. He chucks his burial suit, finds a pair of boots in the garbage, and begins to acquire clothing. Then, flashbacks of memory come to him, until he becomes the Crow. At the film's end, he's still wearing those same boots. And the trenchcoat he wears later in the film he acquires off one of the people he kills. I like that slow accumulation of other people's lives equaling the living, walking entity that becomes Eric Draven."

The casting of Brandon Lee (CS #37) as the lead had a profound impact on the production, according to Schow. "Ever since he came to the project, he just wiped away every previous notion, and he threw himself so deeply and so totally into the character that it's impossible to think of *The Crow* anymore without thinking of Brandon. I mean, he *is* the Crow. I think where he was in his career and everything else at the time made it perfect for Brandon. And, he was very helpful with the script too. He had a lot of input into his character, because he needed to know how to get inside this guy's head."

Producer Jeff Most agrees: "We could not possibly have found a nicer, more well-informed, enlightening individual to play the part. Brandon was the sweetest guy you could possibly work with. His was a unique talent. What he brought to the script, and his take on the character, influenced the final stages of writing. He was a tremendous boost for us, and he absolutely astonished us with his understanding of story and character as an actor in the role. This man was born to be Eric—there's just no doubt about it in my mind. His previous work made me feel absolutely certain that he could act and could do fantastically well, especially with the athletic abilities he had, which the role called for. But, the fact of the matter is that his talents as an actor—to play through the makeup and

to pull this character off, make him tangible, real, believable—were phenomenal. When Eric is kicking butt, you couldn't ask for a more athletic individual—it's believable, it's real, and it's astonishingly exciting—and in the tender moments, you feel the melancholy, the passion, the yearning. And when he speaks to someone like Darla, he's heart-moving. Words aren't enough to describe him."

Design & Layout: Jim McLennan

"His violence is tempered with a lyricism and a poetic style," relates Most, "because he was a human who was not a warrior—he was an artist."

Most, who began the project with original writer John Shirley, was involved with *The Crow* in its various transformations for a decade. "I went out to every studio, every mini-major, a lot of companies, and everywhere I went I was told the same thing—that the comics were too dark, that it would never be a movie. Eventually, I found my way to Ed Pressman, who was very interested when he saw the comic, and was also interested in John Shirley's work as a screenwriter. That was the beginning.

"I was adamant about the project, because I saw in it a romantic hero, a hero who would speak to kids particularly of an urban environment. I, myself, grew up in Manhattan and lived on the Lower East Side when I was at NYU Film School; I had always been attracted to 'the edge.' I felt that that kind of world spoke more to kids, who see a lot of what has happened through the last 15 years to the inner cities. My feeling was that the Gotham City of *Batman* really didn't speak to anyone, because that's a make-believe world. And the environment of Detroit in *The Crow* was a realistic—nightmarish, yes, but realistic—place that no film seemed to address. You find representations of poverty-stricken areas or ghettos in movies, but you don't see the inner workings of that world and the effect on the people in the same manner—meaning a multi-cultural experience.

"It's a comic book," continues the producer, "but it's a heightened sense of reality. It's a reality portrayed in the tones of black and white as well, so the harshness, the greyness of life really comes through. Although comics are generally fantastic in their nature and in their environment, the only fantastic element here really is Eric himself, the Crow. For the most part, the rest of it is a place that could be found in many a dark alley in many an urban-decayed area.

"I'm a fan of comic books, and I must say I've always been attracted to the darker, the less mainstream comics. For example, I grew up reading stuff like *The Freak Brothers* and *Young Lust* and some of the dirtier comics of the time. In my youth, *Superman* and *The Fantastic Four* were big, and I was an *Archie* fan as well. But as an adult, I've been a real big Moebius fan. The first thing that grabbed me about *The Crow* was the artistic talent of James O'Barr. I was amazed by it. James grabbed my attention with his visceral imagery which, essentially, is laid out as a feature film, with insert shots directing the eye towards the scene's action. So, I was immediately drawn into the comic, and I didn't have to envision for myself the world it was set in based on panels that edged in from nowhere—I had a precise, direct, meaningful correlation to the place. It really reminded me of my days on the Lower East Side, which I was fortunate enough to inhabit without being stuck in that world. I felt that this was absolutely a work of art that should be transported to the screen."

Most insists that despite the protagonist's self-obsession, the Crow is a hero. "He is bound by what he can do," he explains. "I mean, he can care for the debt, he can, in a sense, put right what was done wrong to those murdered, and can be seen as a knight in shining armor taking vengeance upon those who, for whatever reason, escaped the law. And, he truly is someone who brings justice to a place where lawlessness prevails. But, it's far beyond a vendetta film. Some executives would complain that it is kind of like *Death Wish*, where it was simply about revenge. It's not that.

"Eric puts everything on the line for Sarah. The movie shows his soft, lyrical side; he's a man who has terrible pains having to relive the emotional impact of seeing his fiancee's death whenever he touches an object. And, that's a very harsh reality to have to live with—to have to replay your own death and the torture of a loved one in your mind many times. But, he is a hero. He does everything he can to care for the living."

"It's a comic book," says producer Jeff Most, "but it's a heightened sense of reality." The villains, like Top Dollar (Michael Wincott), are also more than real.

According to Most, the reasoning behind the hero's emergence out of the grave has to do with a new myth invented by the filmmakers, one that's "rooted in Gothic novels—that a man can return—in the same sense that *Frankenstein* took the steps to show a man pieced back together and brought back to life. Because of the ruthlessness of these people—it's a random choice that it be Eric to return, but a power of good that wants to see evil brought down, and allows this man to return for a short period of time so that the purveyors of all evil in this part of the world are stopped. It's a real story of good versus evil, although the Crow has a more fully rounded character than most pure action heroes. His violence is tempered with lyricism and a poetic style, because he was a human who was not a warrior—he was an artist. And so, placing him in this world, with the talents that he possesses and the imperviousness to injury, he's a man who rises to the occasion and takes some pleasure in seeing the demise of evil. But, he's also an individual who yearns more than anything else for a reunification with his loved one, and to spend the afterlife at peace. So, it's really a story of good overcoming evil."

Most says he departed from the

(continued on page 58)

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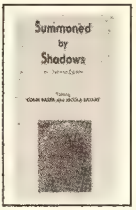

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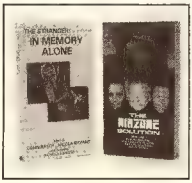

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...Editor Dave McDonnell was right, we readers don't write enough...and yes, there are many opinions, criticisms and lots of questions about the industry. So, I personally assure you I will write more about them, starting right now.

It's nothing new, but violence in comics is something the new generations of readers have been dealing with since a long time ago. Worse, they accept and have become accustomed to it. Comic books are becoming less escapist and more reality-based, but, in many cases, it's a reality that offers few hopes to change the reality itself.

The killing of Superman proved an excellent marketing gimmick, relying on the feelings of guilt of many Supes fans who had turned a cold shoulder to their favorite hero, in honor of others more aggressive-looking than the Kryptonian. Batman followed, and the results were almost the same—if not more—ending with the birth of a ruthless Batman, so ruthless that even a change in his costume was necessary. DC continues what seemed to be an excellent idea for the '90s, the grimmer and the grittier the better.

The war is not over, 'cause Marvel's ready to turn Spidey ruthless and brutal, has apparently killed Reed Richards and is poised to wipe the FF off the face of the Marvel Universe.

Well, surely the industry grows and changes and even when many of those stories are well-done, with interesting plots, I think many are sad and depressing, so far from the excitement of adventure and so far from hope.

The bad thing about that isn't the violence in itself, but the fact that many of the assassinations, paralysis, rape, blood, etc. take place in comic books that work within the Code. I know we live in a grim world and in a violent country, but that's no excuse to avoid showing the newer generations that there's light at the end of the tunnel, and a hope for the industry.

Eugenio Vidal-Diaz
7331 NW 35th Street
Box 117
Miami, FL 33122-1268

...One thing I turn to with interest is the page detailing movies, etc. to be made from comics characters. I also greatly enjoy articles on comics-based movies and TV series. I was greatly enthused about watching *The Fantastic Four* last fall, after your articles.

Imagine my dismay at *no* movie, and, worse yet, absolutely no mention that I could find of what had happened. Is there still to be a movie? When/where/how is it to be released if there really is? Why did you play such a dirty trick on me and, presumably, others?

Bruce Bishop
997 East 7800 South
Midvale, UT 84047

It wasn't our *dirty trick. As reported in CS #42, that* Fantastic Four *film—already subjected to several release date changes—has been shelved permanently. Instead,* another FF *film (a 20th Century Fox project to be directed by Chris Columbus) is in the works.*

...Superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Captain America, etc. are neo-myths; they are our Hercules, our Perseus, our Prometheus. They affect the emotional, creative and vicarious side to human nature. Comic books are the allegorical fables of the 20th century.

I felt I had to write this letter in response to the high level of acerbity that came out of the Howard Chaykin interview in issue #41. Chaykin said, "If most comic books had real-world rules imposed on them, they wouldn't work." How many real-world rules are comic books *supposed* to have? Wouldn't real-world views defeat the purpose of most comic books? I'm not against his idea of putting real-world thinking into comic books; that is a great idea. But the impression that I got from the article, and what bothered me, was that he was fiercely turning his nose up at the concepts of the traditional superhero and the superhero idealism. I believe that if it wasn't for those traditional concepts, created by Stan Lee, Bob Kane and others, Chaykin would not have been able to do what he is doing—re-evaluating, redesigning and modernizing the superhero. The way Chaykin bad-mouthed the concepts of traditional superheroes was like a building scorning the bricks that built it.

Craig T. Lewis
121-11 234 Street
Rosedale, NY 11422

...I've wanted to write to you guys for quite awhile now. After I read your last plea for letters in Word Balloons, now seemed like a good time. I've read your magazine since its first incarnation in the early '80s and have always enjoyed it, as it supplemented my comic reading in a colorful and timely way.

The point about letters not coming in due to computer bulletin boards could be a valid one. So, I've come up with a suggestion. I occasionally log-on to different boards and leave questions and strike up conversations about comics on-line. It is somewhat interactive and a response is usually waiting the next night that I log-on. Has COMICS SCENE ever thought of holding their own letter section on one of the national commercial bulletin boards? CompuServe or GEnie are both fairly active with comic and comics-related sections. You could actually reprint some of the comments from the bulletin board in future issues. A couple of video game and computer magazines do just that.

I also have a request for an article. Something that has been missing is an article about reprints. Different comic companies have done different types of reprinting of Golden Age comics with various results. My favorites have been DC's Archive Editions. Their production has usually been top-notch, so I have a feeling that there are some very talented artists involved who should be publicly acknowledged. True, this material was drawn by the original artists, but the Archive Editions have faithfully restored art that just can't come from original drawings, because I simply don't believe the art exists or is accessible. It's interesting to see how Superman, Batman and others have evolved from the early years, as well as the evolution of the production of these Archive books. I point out *Dark Knight Archives 1, Shazam! Archives 1* and *Batman Archives 3* as specific examples of how high DC's standards are when it comes to restoring 50-year-old comics. I notice on the credits page that Brian Pearce works at DC and has done publication design on these books. Is he the same Brian Pearce whose cartoons appeared in your letter column during the first run of the magazine in the early '80s? If so, this could be an article about how a comics fan made it and an interesting article on the topic of comic book restoring and archiving.

Cher Paulin
Leeds, MA

Yes, it's the same Brian Pearce, now at DC. Other past contributors (Peter David, Scott Lobdell, Hank Kanalz, Barry Dutter, Phil Nutman) have gone from writing about comics for this magazine to actually writing comics. Previous CS Editors Bob Greenberger and Howard Zimmerman also work in comics at, respectively, DC and Byron Preiss Publications (Howard's scripting Topps' new Bill, the Galactic Hero *comic, due out in June). Ex-Contributing Editor Lia Pelosi is now Assistant Editor of Marvel's* 2099 *titles. And COMICS SCENE's last three Managing Editors—Eddie Berganza, Mike McAvennie and Maureen McTigue—work at DC. Eddie and Mike are Assistant Editors. Maureen's the Assistant Manager, Marketing Communications.*

Art: James D. Kester

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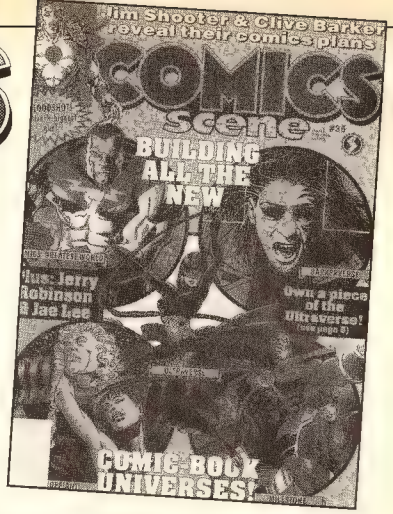
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CAFFEINATED CRIMEFIGHTER

Can Too Much Coffee Man make it in the comic book biz?

He's powered by his addictions to caffeine and nicotine. He's oblivious to everything that goes on around him. He fights such "horrible" menaces as Trademark Copyright Man and the Cliché.

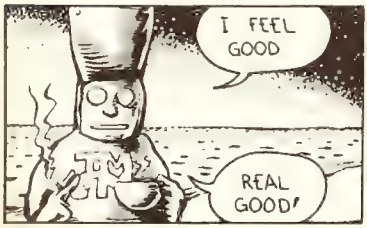
His sidekicks tend to end up dead. When he goes into a "manic paranoid caffeine frenzy," the grannies he's trying to protect better watch out or they'll end up dead as well—he's as lethal to his friends as he is to his foes.

Forget Superman, Spider-Man, Spawn or the Punisher. There's a new superhero in town. He's overweight (and oh-so unappealing in his tight-fitting spandex costume). He's a chain smoker. He goes *waaaaay* overboard on his coffee intake.

He's Too Much Coffee Man, the *perfect* hero for the seldom-decaffeinated mid-1990s.

And, as far as those expiring assistants and dying grannies go, you shouldn't worry about it too much because, as Too Much Coffee Man's creator says, "Everybody is dying because of [Too Much Coffee Man's] carelessness, but it's funny because they make a 'Gak!' noise when they die, or make a big splat or something like that."

Too Much Coffee Man is the brainchild of artist and writer Shannon Wheeler, a twentysomething Californian transplanted to Texas. Wheeler and his caffeinated creation seem to have struck a chord with their twentysomething audience. A crowd that might have a hard time relating to days filled with saving the Earth from universe-sucking extraterrestrials seems to better relate to mornings of coffee-fueled existential musings on the toilet. All of which is to say, Too Much



Coffee—the elixir of life. Thanks to the sacred java juice, Shannon Wheeler has catapulted himself into flavor-crystal stardom with *Too Much Coffee Man*.

All Art: By & Courtesy Shannon Wheeler

All Too Much Coffee Man Characters & Art: Copyright 1993, 1994 Shannon Wheeler

Coffee Man is actually becoming popular.

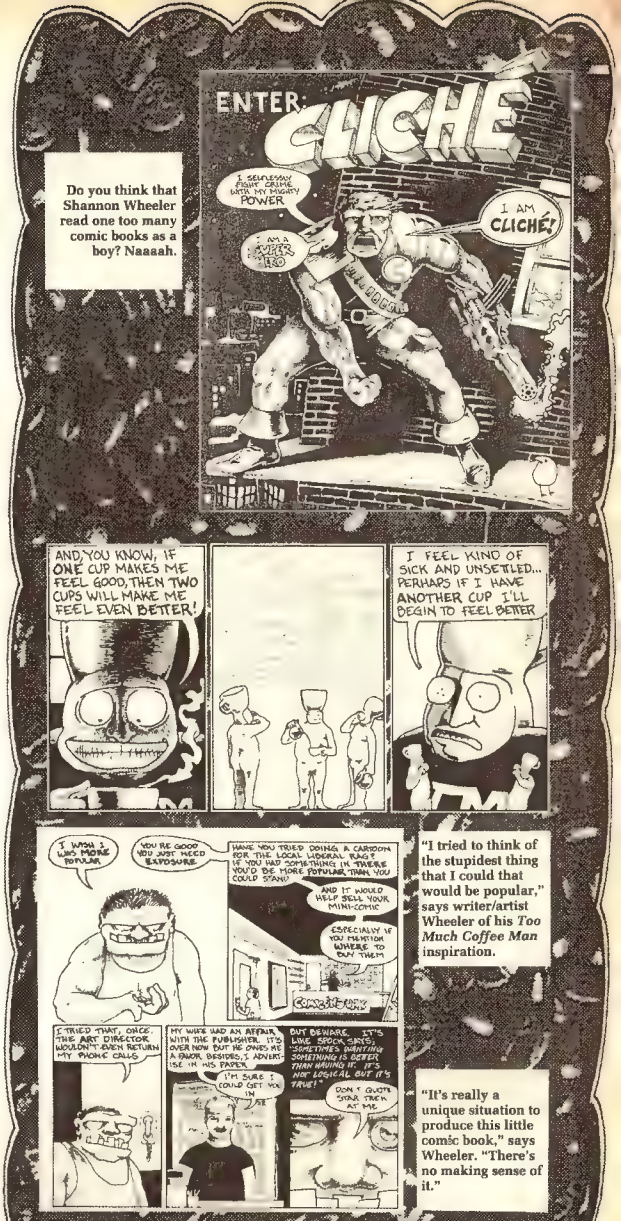
Wheeler didn't set out to be a cartoonist. When he first went to the University of California at Berkeley, he intended to major in fine arts. But he found that that particular curriculum didn't have enough discipline for him. He switched to architecture, and in 1988, he began doing comic strips for Berkeley's college paper, the *Daily Californian*.

Those Too Much Coffee Man-less strips Wheeler produced for his college paper proved popular enough that Blackbird Comics published a collection, *Children with Glue*. That publication inadvertently led to the creation of Too Much Coffee Man.

Wheeler says, "When I published *Children With Glue*, it wasn't selling very well and I wanted to do a promotional comic to help push the sales. So, I did a mini-comic of Too Much Coffee Man which sold really well. The first one sold for a quarter or 50 cents. My theory was, 'I'll do a mini-comic for 50 cents that people could buy. They'll read it, and like it, and then come back and spend five bucks on *Children with Glue*.' But people would just buy the mini-comic. They would go, 'Oh, this is great. Is there more Too Much Coffee Man?' I would say, 'No, the Too Much Coffee Man is just kind of a gimmick...but the humor is real similar to the book.' And they would say, 'Oh, I just like the Too Much Coffee Man. I'm going to send it to all my friends.' And they would go out and buy four or five mini-comics but they wouldn't buy the book it was promoting. It was a pretty big red flag for me to go with Too Much Coffee Man."

Too Much Coffee Man began, uhh, percolating in 1989. "I was sitting there," Wheeler recalls, "I was trying to figure out why my comic wasn't more popular. I was thinking about what makes cartoons popular. You need a gimmick or a handle on it, some single aspect that people can latch onto very easily. My college cartoon was about relationships and really didn't have a gimmick. I would tell people, 'I do the cartoon "Tooth and Justice" [the name of one of his college strips.]' And they would say, 'Which one is that?' I would say, 'Uh...it has a talking dog in it.' And they would say, 'Oh yeah, the talking dog.'

"So, I thought, 'Well, what can I do to be popular? I want to be popular with the hip crowd. Weeeellll...I guess I could do a coffee cartoon, I'll do Too Much Coffee Man.' I tried to think of the *stupidest* thing I could that would be popular. And it has worked with a vengeance.


Do you think that Shannon Wheeler read one too many comic books as a boy? Naaaah.
ENTER: CLICHE
I SELFLESSLY FIGHT CRIME WITH MY MIGHTY POWER
I AM A CLICHÉ!
I AM CLICHÉ!
AND, YOU KNOW, IF ONE CUP MAKES ME FEEL GOOD, THEN TWO CUPS WILL MAKE ME FEEL EVEN BETTER!
I FEEL KIND OF SICK AND UNSETTLED... PERHAPS IF I HAVE ANOTHER CUP I'LL BEGIN TO FEEL BETTER
I WISH I WAS MORE POPULAR
YOU'RE GOOD YOU JUST NEED EXPOSURE
HAVE YOU TRIED DOING A CARTOON FOR THE LOCAL LIBERAL RAG? IF YOU HAD SOMETHING IN THERE YOU'D BE MORE POPULAR, THAN YOU COULD STAND!
AND IT WOULD HELP SELL YOUR MINI-COMIC
ESPECIALLY IF YOU MENTION WHERE TO BUY THEM
COMIC-CON
I TRIED THAT, ONCE. THE ART DIRECTOR WOULDN'T EVEN RETURN MY PHONE CALLS
MY WIFE HAD AN AFFAIR WITH THE PUBLISHER. IT'S OVER NOW BUT HE OWES ME A FAVOR. BESIDES, I ADVERTISE IN HIS PAPER
I'M SURE I COULD GET YOU IN
BUT BEWARE. IT'S LIKE SPOCK SAYS, SOMETIMES SOMETHING IS BETTER THAN HAVING IT. IT'S NOT LOGICAL BUT IT'S TRUE!
DON'T QUOTE STAR TREK AT ME

"I tried to think of the stupidest thing that I could that would be popular," says writer/artist Wheeler of his *Too Much Coffee Man* inspiration.

"It's really a unique situation to produce this little comic book," says Wheeler. "There's no making sense of it."

CARTOONING HAS GOT TO BE THE EASIEST JOB IN THE ENTIRE WORLD!
I SIT AROUND ALL DAY THINK AND SWEAT
WELL, TIME TO GET TO WORK!
YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO FOOL AROUND? IT WOULDN'T HAVE TO MEAN ANYTHING
HEY!!! I'M IN COUCH WATCHING PEOPLE READ HIS COMIC!
SLEEP
ZZZ
SORRY!
I SAW THAT GUY AND HIS GIRLFRIEND LAST NIGHT
YOU SAW HIM WHERE?
I WAS IN A COMIC SHOP WATCHING PEOPLE READ HIS COMIC
THAT'S WEIRD
OH, AND I SAW YOUR EX-GIRLFRIEND, EVE, AND HER NEW GUY. DO YOU WANT A BEER?
RELAX NO ONE IS OUT TO GET YOU
I WAS WORRIED. BUT NOT ANYMORE
GO AHEAD, EAT YOUR FOOD. THE KITCHEN IS FREE OF THE DEADLY SALMONELLA DISEASE.
THE BIG COMPANIES WANT YOUR MONEY. THEY ALSO HAVE YOUR INTERESTS AT HEART.
THE GUY WHO KEEPS LOOKING AT YOU ISN'T TRYING TO PICK YOU UP
THE IRS WON'T AUDIT YOU. YOU'VE DONE NOTHING WRONG.
WHY NOT WATCH SOME TV. IT'S NOT A WASTE OF TIME
THE TV NEWS IS AN ACCURATE SOURCE OF INFORMATION.
THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE ALL OVER-REACTING. THE OZONE IS FINE
THE GOVERNMENT LOOKS OUT FOR THE COMMON MAN
THEY'D TELL US IF SOMETHING WE'RE REALLY WRONG.
HAPPINESS IS AVAILABLE TO THOSE WHO PURSUE IT.
EVERYONE IS NOT IN ON A COSMIC JOKE THAT YOU KNOW NOTHING OF.
YOUR GIRLFRIEND ISN'T HAVING AN AFFAIR NOT WITH YOUR BEST FRIEND.
THEY'RE YOUR FRIENDS. THEY WOULDN'T LAUGH AT YOU BEHIND YOUR BACK.
IT ISN'T A MEANINGLESS EXERCISE IN FUTILITY
THERE IS LIFE-AFTER-DEATH AND IT'S A LOT NICER THAN THIS ONE
RELAX
ENJOY YOUR LIFE. HAVE SOME COFFEE. I'M SURE THE HEALTH RISKS ARE NEGLIGIBLE

"The Cartoonist part is about the struggle to produce artwork," states Wheeler. "I really wanted to get into what it's like to produce something."

"The way people relate to each other really interests me, and I do that through the other characters," maintains Wheeler.

"It's all a gimmick, you know," Wheeler says. "People have this empathetic response to the notion of coffee because it's a drug that produces a mild euphoria and is highly addictive."

Wheeler says his book is more than a one-joke affair. "I really put a lot of myself into *Too Much Coffee Man*," he says. "The coffee joke is all in the title. The jokes and the humor are about other things besides coffee. I think that's what will sustain it. I give it some depth. I'm not doing the obvious with it, which pisses some people off. They say things like, 'Why isn't this stupid or trite like everything else?' "

This creator says he isn't interested in superhero satire, though he admits, "a few of the gags are definitely [satirical] because he's not a superhero and he's completely unconscious of his own behavior. And, because of the character's structure, it's inadvertently a superhero parody. Superheroes are very much about a lack of consequence in their lives. Generally, superheroes get in a big fight and nobody ends up paralyzed—*ever*. Babies don't get squashed by the falling brick wall when Spider-Man fights the Green Goblin. It's the opposite of *Too Much Coffee Man* in that he's completely unconscious of the effect that he has on others. Everyone gets squashed in *Too Much Coffee Man*. People die because of his carelessness.

"I really like doing *Too Much Coffee Man*. I've really poured a lot of my soul into it. I don't really look at him as a character in and of himself but just as a means to say the things I want to say. If I want to talk about the fear of death, I do it through *Too Much Coffee Man*."

Too Much Coffee Man's first appearance in a normal-sized comic (actually, a larger-sized reprint of his mini-comic adventures) came about in March 1992. Wheeler and a handful of other comic book writers, artists and colorists banded together one summer's day in Austin, Texas around the altar of an abandoned printing press and under the banner of Adhesive Comics. The publishing collective they formed solicited the aid of Funny Papers, an Austin comic book store, and put together *Jab* #1, which included those reprinted Too Much Coffee Man tales, as well as Wiley Akins' twisted one-page "If the World Were Ruled By Flesh-Eating Monkeys" strip, the blasphemous, adolescent humor of Tom King's "Digger Jones, Boy Mortician" and the adventure strip "Gylania" by Ashley Underwood and Aubrey and DeAnne McAuley. (Adhesive Comics has just released *Jab* #5 as well as the first issue of Underwood and Aubrey McAuley's *Eden Matrix*.)

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

"*Jab* started out as just a chaotic mess," Wheeler says, "where we each contributed what we could, put it all together into a package, and put it out there. Our first issue did OK. Then, *Jab* #2's sales dropped to where we were like, 'Oh Noooo! We can't do this anymore!' We were sitting around, saying, 'We need a gimmick.' Ashley said, 'Well, why don't we shoot it with a gun?' And that's when we did the bullet hole issue."

Stacks of *Jab* #3 were shot with a .22 rifle in lots of 10, so that every 10th issue became a "Special Collectors Edition" with powder burns on its cover. *Jab* #3 even came complete with the disclaimer: "To any concerned or litigious parent: We at Adhesive realize that shooting a gaping hole into any object does not increase its value. That's like saying, 'polybagging something increases its value—I think I'll polybag my head!' Don't Try This At Home." The gimmick *did* cause sales to triple.

"That got us 'on the map,' Wheeler notes. "It made us able to do the comic book again."

After *Jab*'s success, Wheeler set out to assemble a comic book that was all his own. And since Too Much Coffee Man was proving to be so popular (Wheeler does a brisk business selling *Too Much Coffee Man* T-shirts, coffee mugs, playing cards and even *Too Much Coffee Man* sponges), it was only natural that the Columbian-ground glutton star in his own title. Adhesive's *Too Much Coffee Man* #1 appeared in August 1993. Wheeler says, "I sold 10,000 of those, which, for an independent black-and-white comic book is really good. It actually made me enough money to live for awhile and put out the second issue."

Matt Ruona, the person upon whom the character "Matt" from the strip "Tooth and Justice" was based, writes in the introduction to *Children with Glue*, "[Wheeler's] cartoons are, in his own words, 'a way to figure things out' for himself. To understand why difficulties arise in human relations: why people align themselves with mutually exclusive schools of thought or choose particular lifestyles, and how they can then paradoxically live in varying degrees of hypocrisy based on these decisions." All of which is to say, there's more going on here than just a fat guy in spandex drinking a lot of coffee.

Too Much Coffee Man isn't just about Too Much Coffee Man, it's also about the personal lives of the cartoonist who draws the *Too Much Coffee Man* comic book, and a reader of the *Too Much Coffee Man* comic book. Both characters are holdovers from Wheeler's "Tooth and Justice" days: both Joel (the fan) and

(continued on page 60)

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN
THINGS YOU CAN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT
I HAVE TO GO TO FRANCE AGAIN FOR MY WORK PAYING $150
I READ ALL THE MAGAZINES NEXT TO EVERY CLOSE AND STOCK'S SUPER HARD BUT I ONLY MADE AN "A"
I'M SO BUSY I DON'T HAVE TIME TO ENJOY THE MONEY I MAKE
MY OWNER END WANTS SEX ALL THE TIME IT'S JUST TOO EXHAUSTING
I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH SPACE FOR ALL MY CDS
THAT'S TOO BAD. I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN IT'S SO ANNOYING HOW TERRIBLE, NOT ENOUGH, IT MUST BE AWFUL. YOU POOR THING. SHUT UP!
DOING WHITE AND MALE TEST KILLS ME ON CREDITS ANY SOD APPLICATIONS
STOP COMPLAINING!!! IT SOUNDS AWFUL IT MAKES YOU LOOK LIKE A JERK AND NO ONE REALLY CARES
WHAT ABOUT YOU HUH? YOU'RE JUST A HYPOCRITE
COUGH COUGH
Wheeler has introduced something in *Too Much Coffee Man* that has managed to elude many other superhero comics—lawsuits.
IT IS WORSE THAN TMCM TO HAVE EVEN THOUGH OUR HERO NOW HAS A LAWYER TMC M HAS A CUP ON HIS HEAD AND NOW THEY FACE OFF CUP AGAINST CUP, MUG AGAINST MUG
I'VE FILED A TRADEMARK ON THE 'CUP-ON-THE-HEAD' AND CONFLICTS ON HAIR REMOVAL, PANANDA, COFFEE ADDICTION, AND EXAGGERATED EXPRESSIONS
FACE IT TOO MUCH COFFEEMAN, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO CHANGE YOUR LIFESTYLE
I HAVE THIS PIECE OF PAPER WHICH SHOWS MY CLIENT TO HAVE THE LEGAL RIGHT TO RETAIN HIS PRESENT PERSONALITY. IT IS A DATED PUBLISHED WORK THAT APPEARED PRIOR TO YOUR FILING OF THE BOGUS COPYRIGHT
GRRR
GRRR
IN THERE!
E HAVE PLACE ROUNDED!
TMCM? THAT'S ME! IT'S ME THEY WANT! BUT...BUT...WHY ME?
I HAVEN'T SUBMITTED ANY CRIMES
POW!
I HAVE DONE A FEW QUESTIONABLE THINGS
VE ERASED HER MARK OFF THE SO I COULD PAY FOR OUR HOURS IN MY MOUTH TOWING DONE
I EAT FOOD OUT OF THE BULK FOOD BIN
VE NEED COFFEE AS A WRITE OFF ON MY TAXES
AND THERE WAS THAT TIME I DIDN'T PULL OUT
The shattering of Too Much Coffee Man's mug was not done by the Wrath of God, but by an actual .22 bullet—courtesy of the special "Bullet-hole issue" of *Jab*.

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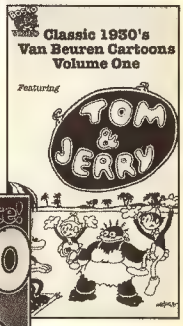

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1007

Gil Kane and Steven Grant pit a normal guy against humanity's ultimate enemy—superheroes.

Everybody knows the Avengers are swell folks who get up in the morning, brush their teeth and then do good all day. Ditto the Doom Patrol and Freak Force. Heck, superheroes in general just make the world a safer place. [illegible] they *did* [illegible] up to no good. Suppose you knew that your local superhero were starting to act less like nice guys and more like Nazis.

***Edge* pits regular-human Eric Carnell against a group of super "heroes" bent on becoming the next Master Race.**

What would you do? You have no super-strength, no wings or claws, no death rays tucked into your fingertips. You're David against an army of Goliaths. *What would you do?*

That's the quandary Eric Carnell faces in the new Bravura series *Edge*, set to premiere this summer. But Carnell really can't back down. The superheroes he's worried about, the Ultimates, got their powers from Carnell's own father. And the public thinks the Ultimates are the greatest thing since HBO. Only Carnell suspects that they're slowly setting themselves up as the next Master Race.

The Ultimates reflect the shadier side of superhero stories, according to *Edge* creators Gil Kane (CS #38) and Steven Grant (CS #31). Kane in particular has seen the heroes grow darker and darker since he first entered the business in 1942. "It's not a black-and-white situation anymore," the artist says. "Heroes are ambiguous. It's clear they're against the villains, but they're also involved on a moment-to-moment basis with violent, negative resolutions to problems. We're no longer dealing with the old Superman or Batman fable—it's more complicated than that."

But Eric Carnell, alias Edge, isn't one of the brooding, brutal superheroes clogging the comics shops. He wears a superguy's costume and mask, and on the cover of *Edge* #1 certainly looks like he could kick the bejeezus out of a couple dozen Justice Leaguers. But his "edge," it turns out, is that he can't fly, bend steel in his bare hands or shoot laser beams out of his nose.

"Why Edge doesn't opt for superpowers is a key element of the story," says writer Grant. "Basically, it's better to be a human being."

Grant laughingly calls Edge "sort of an anti-Image hero," and explaining that phrase takes some background. Kane originally called Grant last year after reading the latter's 1992 Dark Horse crime series *Badlands*. "I thought it was literary," Kane says. "Being literary in comics is a *real* achievement."

Kane asked Grant if he would like to write a planned revival of Kane's *His Name Is...Savage!*, a forerunner of the graphic novel and ultraviolent comics. (Kane's still in negotiations with Dark Horse on that project.) In the meantime, though, the grapevine murmured that Image might be knocking on Kane's door for a new series. So, Grant scooped up some Image comics to see what made them tick.

"This isn't a knock on Image—I actually like most of their books—but there were elements that rankled me," Grant says. "For instance, in *Youngblood*, having media-star superheroes who work for the government and do whatever they want to, isn't the sort of thing *I* would like to see politically. *Edge* is a reaction to what I saw in the Image books."

Grant and Kane set out to explore how superbeings might *really* respond to being super, and how this might affect the rest of us. "The idea behind *Edge* is that everybody operates in their own self-interest, and they rationalize that what they're doing is in the best interest of society," Grant explains. "Having superpowers wouldn't change that."

As the creators brainstormed, the series underwent a name change (it was called *Slaughter* until Jim Valentino trademarked that name) and a label switch. When the Image offer didn't materialize, the duo took *Edge* to Malibu's creator-owned Bravura line, which also includes titles by Jim Starlin, Howard Chaykin and Walter Simonson. The final project marries a classical story about destiny and familial responsibility with a science-fiction hook involving genetically engineered superheroes, the Ultimates.

Dr. James Carnell started the Ultimates program to help humanity. He even wanted his eldest son, Eric, to lead the Ultimates, envisioned as a sort of super-duper Peace Corps. But Eric's doubts—linked to the Plague, a swarm of failed Ultimates—caused him to refuse those superpowers. Jack Carnell, Eric's younger brother, took the powers and decided that the Ultimates should have colorful costumes and zingy names like Winged Victory, Narcissus, Cyberoptic and his own *nom de boom*, Edge.

"The Ultimates were developed to benefit mankind," Kane notes. "But the first opportunity they get, they recognize their special advantages and simply benefit themselves." Not in the obvious ways—robbing ATMs or sweeping the Olympics—but by gradually influencing legislation, abandoning their humanitarian program for showy battles, changing society until, as Grant says, "it's their world and not ours."

"When people come out of the Ultimates program, they're more *themselves* than ever, and that's part of the

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

problem," Grant says. "They don't drop their psychological baggage. They still operate according to their own personal motivations. The main problem with the Ultimates is you can't program someone to be an altruist."

As the series opens, Jack is dead (possibly murdered) and Dr. Carnell has committed suicide (or so it seems). The Ultimates—headed by Mr. Ultimate, a superstrong Svengali figure—are swinging the balance of power their way.

To psych out the Ultimates, Eric impersonates their dead leader Edge. But unlike the first Edge, Eric doesn't have any special powers, just an underdog's grit.

The idea that superheroes aren't as wonderful as they seem has bounced around before, in books like *Watchmen*, Rick Veitch's *Brat Pack* and Chaykin's *Power and Glory* (CS #41). But both Grant and Kane are interested in other angles of their story. "My main focus," Grant says, "is a nonpowered guy coming up against people who could turn him into little puddles of mud."

For artist Kane, *Edge* is a chance to explore "the abstract structure of *Frankenstein*," which he says is part and parcel of the superhero myth. "Even Superman is essentially a Frankenstein story," Kane says. "If he revealed his identity, his monstrous strength would represent a threat to everyone around him. He's average in his intelligence, his point-of-view, but godlike in his power. To have godlike power in the hands of someone incapable of profound thinking—what could be more terrifying?

"Dr. James Carnell is basically a Victor Frankenstein figure. He feels it's possible to improve things for people through these monsters he has created. But instead, he finds that he has unleashed a whole new plague on the general population. Edge feels obligated—as Victor Frankenstein did—to destroy this threat to society."

Edge avoids superpowers in part because his own creators feel it's time for the "human being" to reenter comics. "Marvel books never talk about *people* anymore," observes Grant, best known for writing *The Punisher*. "Superhero comics just deal with superheroes. Normal people don't exist, except to be rescued.

"Gil and I are dealing with many superhero issues that have bothered us over the years. *Edge* is our way of saying in print everything we've always wanted to say about superheroes. It's probably our last hurrah in the superhero genre."

Would you believe the second-to-last hurrah? After *Edge* (planned to run at least eight issues, possibly as two four-book mini-series), Kane has to complete the *Killing Machine* series for DC; it may debut later this year. Grant is booked to write *Manhunter* for DC this year, and has some other possibilities (besides *Savage*) in sight.

Anyway, what has been eating these guys all these years about superheroes? "I *don't* like writing about superpowered people," complains Grant, whose 16-year comics career includes a recent stint on *Spectacular Spider-Man*. "I like writing about people with no special powers. There's more flexibility in the stories you can tell. The way normal people deal with situations has to do with what they had for breakfast, whether they had an argument with their boss or wife—not how much energy they've stored up in their optic nerve."

In addition, Grant insists, the standard superhero's given motivation is *way* off. "You don't really think Spider-Man fights crime because of his Uncle Ben's death, do you?" he insinuates. "He gets a *kick* out of it. That's the thing that's not factored into the Ultimate equation—that having superpowers might be considered fun. Being an Ultimate is a big kick."

On the other hand, Kane feels comics rarely exploit the staggering implications of superheroes' power. "One of the things I always felt was a weakness in books like *Superman* or *Green Lantern*," he says, naming two of his own past labors, "is that these guys can *stop the Sun in its tracks*. Think about what that means. The whole idea of a single person being capable of *that* and then doing the mundane, pointless, shallow things these characters do in comics is ridiculous. It's better to have a character with limited capabilities, so their behavior isn't absurd when you consider the possibilities."

Kane's a funny guy. His vision of heroism was shaped by swashbuckling archetypes like Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Errol Flynn, and by comics like Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, that reflected the romantic tradition. But with *His Name is...Savage!*, Kane also introduced several grotesque conventions of comics' violent anti-heroes, including teeth flying from a bloody mouth. He

(continued on page 62)

All Edge Art: Gil Kane/Courtesy Malibu

"Basically, it's better to be a human being," says *Edge* writer Steven Grant, who sees this as a response to Image-style heroics.

DAEMONIC

Nelson, the man with one name, nurtures a really big purple demon.

All Art: By & Courtesy Nelson All Eudaemon Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Illusta Comics, Inc.

Part of the allure of *Eudaemon* is the full-painted artwork that accompanies every issue. "Black-and-white [line art] has a right or wrong look that painting doesn't."

DELIGHTS

By DREW BITTNER

I imagine learning that you're the only one who can stop inter-dimensional invaders from taking over Earth, killing or enslaving billions and making this planet a much less enjoyable place for mankind.

It's a nonstop, lifetime commitment. No coffee breaks, no vacations. No marriage or family. And, to make matters worse, every now and again you turn into a big purple demon. Bobby Formazzo doesn't have to imagine it—he lives it, in *Eudaemon*, a continuing saga written and drawn by Nelson (who uses only one name) for Dark Horse Comics.

"Bobby has it pretty rough," Nelson says. "While his father is dying, he tells Bobby, 'Oh, by the way, this huge responsibility is yours for the rest of your life—sorry I won't be around. Bye!' It leaves Bobby confused."

Being partly from another dimension himself, Bobby can sense when otherworldly portals open, thus calling him to duty. In the two mini-series published to date, Bobby and his best friend Eddie Pensa have shouldered this heavy burden by themselves. However, in the upcoming third mini-series, Nelson promises that new faces will appear on the scene.

"I have three new characters coming up who will change things around for Bobby," he says. "First is Fallout, the Living Shelter. He's a government experiment gone wrong. Next is Volkarra, a 'spider woman' from the same dimension as Eudaemon's father. And the last is Knucklehead, a really, *really* vicious criminal. Their story ties in with what happens to Bobby and Eddie in the next three issues. The new three-parter picks up from the last page of the previous book, and forges ahead from there."

Eudaemon is Bobby's previously unsuspected and monstrous alter ego, the last of his kind, charged (or sentenced) with the task of keeping his kinfolk from emigrating to Earth.

"These beings have been around for a long time; they exist in another dimension on the other end of the time-space continuum. Sometimes, portals open between these dimensions, allowing a horde of evil, nasty freaks to try to come over here—these guys want our space. As things stand right now, Eudaemon is either one of these evil freaks, one who can take human form, or he's a mixed breed; in either case, he's the last of his race with the power to manipulate portals. He isn't totally alone; there are a few good guys on the other side, except that they look pretty much like the evil freaks who want to take over. But, Eudaemon's the one stuck with all the responsibility. He knows what might happen if even a few of these guys get through. And Bobby always thought he was just an average guy.

Nelson says that Bobby's past will be explored in flashbacks, where he's shown as a child to have some weird psychic powers.

"He has this ability to detect portals opening as an adult, but even when he was a kid, there were some things he could sense," Nelson says. "We'll see that there was a great deal going on with Bobby that he just didn't realize, until his dad explained everything. These demons have been trying to break through for ages and now Bobby must stop them. It's like finding out you have cancer or a terminal medical condition; it's going to be with you for the rest of your life, which may not be that long. You start to ask yourself, 'Why me?' Bobby goes through a sort of nervous breakdown, which Eddie helps him out of."

Bobby's best friend, Eddie Pensa, has also been in training his entire life to help support Eudaemon's lonely crusade. The son of a CIA agent who worked with Bobby's dad (thus the connection), Eddie was raised to have the skills and inner strength needed to be Eudaemon's loyal squire/coach. Nelson says that while he personally is the basis for Eddie's look and personal-

Colors: James Brown & Frank Lopez

Didja ever have one of those days? Thanks to writer/artist Nelson, Bobby Formazzo's day started as a doozy, and is only getting worse. He's purple.

It's tough being a good guy wrapped in a 7-foot-4 mass of purple muscle. Let's just say that New York's Finest frown upon demons in spandex.

"I sometimes think that I'm having more fun making *Eudaemon* than anyone could have reading it," says Nelson.

Watch the skies, Eudaemon, for Mördare awaits—and anyone who can lick their own forehead deserves a wide berth.

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton • Pencils: Frank Lopez

ly, he borrowed the name from New York TV news reporter Ralph Penza.

"Eddie is a Latino character, but I didn't want to make it overwhelming," Nelson says. "I thought 'Penza' gives the right ethnic feel to the character. Long ago, Eddie was told by his father the reasons why he was getting all this training, and thought his dad had flipped out—until he saw his friend turn into a 7-foot-4 mass of purple muscle. He can only say, 'Hey, maybe Dad *wasn't* so crazy.'

"I'm serious about giving my characters reasons for doing what they do," Nelson insists. "You don't just throw on a costume and risk your life by tackling criminals; you *must* have a compelling reason to do that."

Known for his painted, highly stylish cover art, Nelson admits that *Eudaemon* probably isn't what people will expect when they see the covers.

"I'm guessing people are expecting a real fantasy comic, with guys named Engar or Krogis bashing hordes of monsters with swords—but it's really much more like *The Incredible Hulk*. I want to keep this book moving, with lots of butt-kicking action."

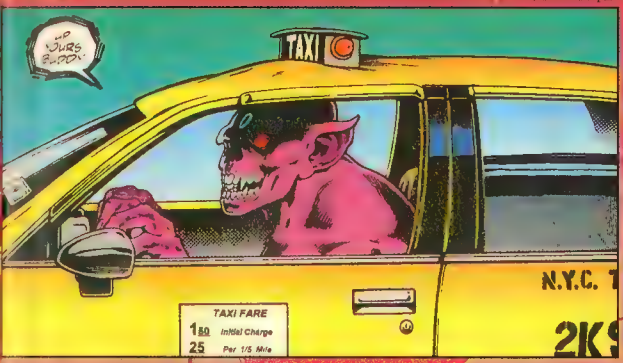
Nelson confesses he doesn't read many comics, partly because he wants to avoid duplicating someone else's work. "It would be *expensive* to buy all the books out there right now, and most of them *don't* really appeal to me," he admits. "I mean, I was reading *X-Men* when Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum were doing the book, then I checked *X-Men* out when Jim Lee and those guys were doing it—I didn't recognize anyone! Who *are* all these guys?

"I don't read anything else that looks like stuff I'm doing or might want to do," he adds. "I want to have a parity to my stuff, keep it fresh and entertaining, that can't happen if I'm *always* worrying about what the other guy is doing."

Doing all of the creative work on a comic is draining, which is why Nelson has a hard time envisioning a monthly *Eudaemon* title. However…

"If I had an inker, it might go a little faster," Nelson muses, "but I really like to take my time and work out these characters and situations before I commit myself to them. At some point, once the characters are really established, I might let another writer come in, so that we can really expand the world they live in—but it would have to be someone who could take my vision and be faithful to it. And that means spending time establishing how these guys look, think, act and react. Batman has been around for 50 years, and he has been done great and done badly, but everyone knows who this guy is and what he's going to do: beat

Colors: Frank Lopez



It's tough enough giving your *average* New York City cabbie directions.

up the bad guy and take him to the cops. I have to have that kind of foundation set before anyone else can write *Eudaemon*. That's the only way a regular series could be done.

"Besides that, I would rather do smaller, self-contained stories," he says. "By giving readers three parts to a story that can stand on its own, they don't have to go out and hunt for all 12 parts of a mega-crossover series. And it's good for me, because I can take six months to do a mini-series, which I could never do if we were trying to put it out more often."

Having developed his artistic skills, Nelson says that he wants to hone other talents by developing *Eudaemon*. "I got into writing this book because I wanted to learn *how* to write," he explains. "It's not easy. Just look at someone like Frank Miller, who just does everything so perfectly—you can see the league I want to be in. So you work a little harder to get the right effect, either in the story or in the art. Since this is comics, the art is more important in the short run—helping sell an issue #1, for instance—but if you don't have a solid story to tell, you won't be around for issue #78."

Creating *Eudaemon* is a personal experience for Nelson in more ways than the obvious one. "The book is based on me and a friend, and many of the situations are drawn from how *we* look at the world. The dialogue in this book is *never* a problem, not when you've known these characters and the guys they're based on as long as I have," he says.

"This is one thing about doing something that's completely yours," Nelson adds. "If you draw a comic for DC or Marvel, you have to do that character [their way]. But doing your own character gives you the leeway to do *anything*. Dark Horse is so cool! They've never put any restrictions on my work; I send them the pages and they send me a paycheck. Working with them is fantastic.

"So far, some people who've read the book have had great comments, which tells me I'm pleasing readers out there. I write, pencil and ink this book myself, so if they don't like the work, it's *my* fault and nobody else's."

Nevertheless, Nelson notes that two co-workers have contributed greatly to *Eudaemon*. "Frank Lopez does such a great job coloring this book, and Steve Dutro's lettering...well, they help make this a quality title."

The comic isn't the only *Eudaemon* product in the works. A *Eudaemon* card set for Press Pass has been completed; however, the current softness of the trading card market has delayed its release.

"We had some great artists contribute to it," Nelson says proudly. "Dave Dorman, Joe Jusko, Jerry Ordway, Joe Quesada, Jimmy Palmiotti—lots of guys. The guest artists did their own versions of these characters, and the cards tell a story that takes place in the future, giving

(continued on page 62)

Colors: James Brown & Frank Lopez

Nelson has ventured into writing for the first time with *Eudaemon*. "I got into writing this book because I wanted to learn how to write. It's not easy."

"Sometimes portals open between [Earth and other] dimensions, allowing a horde of evil, nasty freaks to try to come over here," relates Nelson.

The Man Who Laughs

Dealing mayhem as the Joker, Mark Hamill is all smiles.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON & ELIZABETH GUNDERSON

Mark Hamill says his voice-over career is a dream come true in many ways. "I'm sorry that I missed out on that whole Golden Age of Radio," he muses. "My generation of actors never got to do that, and the closest thing would be animated voices. They cast you for the way you sound, *not* the way you look. At first, it's a little disconcerting to realize casting directors are turning their heads as you're auditioning, but if not for that, I don't think I would have snared the role of the Joker!

"Having read about the animated *Batman* series in the *Comics Buyers' Guide*, and the fact that they were emulating the Max Fleischer *Superman* cartoons, and being an animation buff, I said, 'This could be really good!' They're going to tell 65 stories, they're going to do it very *noir*, Dark Knight-ish—I told my writing partner that we should get in and pitch villains that they hadn't done in the Adam West TV series or the Tim Burton movies. It turned out that most of the stories were already assigned by that time, but I wound up doing a voice in 'Heart of Ice,' where my character is responsible for Michael Ansara becoming Mr. Freeze. I was very impressed by the script; it was very melancholy for children's animation. I promptly forgot about it, because my original approach was as a writer.

Jedi Photo: Albert Clarke/Copyright 1982 Lucasfilm Ltd

Once a Jedi, comics fan Hamill is delighted to voice the Clown Prince of Crime.

"They called me six weeks later and asked me to audition for the Joker [initially voiced by Tim Curry, who left the role]. I did, and I eventually got it. When I auditioned, I *really* wanted it, and when they told me I had it, I thought, 'No, what did I get myself into?! He's too big an icon! I would much rather have done Ra's Al Ghul or Clayface—somebody where people *didn't* have expectations!' "

Hamill didn't think about competing with past Jokers Cesar Romero or Jack Nicholson until he actually got the part. "Then, I thought, 'What kind of fool follows Jack Nicholson in *anything*?!' " he laughs. "Not only that, but I had a set of all the Adam West *Batmans*. I was a big fan of the TV show—I know that's heresy to some people, but there are some fantastic performances on that show. I'll never forget Frank Gorshin as the Riddler—I did homages to him as the Trickster on *The Flash*!"

As the middle child of seven, Hamill can't remember a time when comic books weren't part of his life. A diverse collection of books, from *Superman* to *Little Lulu*, were widely passed around and traded, read until they were unreadable and even then too beloved to throw away. On long car trips, Hamill and his numerous siblings were given money to buy what they wanted, and comic books always topped the list.

Since his father was in the Navy, the family moved often and collections frequently underwent secret parental pruning, causing many books to "disappear" before a move, with the comics' absence discovered only when the children reached their new home.

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

When the family got transferred from Virginia to Japan, Hamill had grudgingly whittled down his number of books to a 4 1/2-inch stack, but he was still determined to ensure that they would show up in Yokohama instead of at Goodwill.

"It would always be at the next stop when you got transferred that you said, 'Gee, what happened to my Dennis the Menace puppets?' and they would say, 'Oh, you're too old for them, we gave them away to the poor kids.' I wasn't going to let this happen to me again, so I got up after everyone went to bed, went down to a box of already-packed kitchen stuff and slipped them in. When we got to Japan, my mom opened the box and found the comics. She was cool and said, 'Oh, I think *these* are *yours*, just don't let your father find out.' That's a stack I still have."

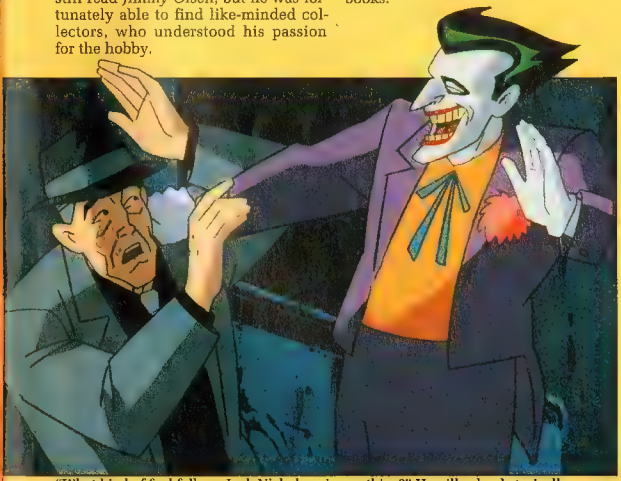
Ironically, long before he had to perfect the Joker voice for animation, Hamill had a special affection for Batman. "I love the fantasy of Superman," he observes, "but strange as it sounds, I used to think Batman was fairly realistic. He didn't have superpowers, he was just incredibly wealthy. As a kid, I thought you could train yourself to the physical perfection that he did and devote yourself to science and detective work and get all the gadgets and fight crime, and it just seemed to me that it was possible."

Hamill's parents tried to shame him out of his comics at a certain age, by smoothly goading, "You're much too old for this, c'mon." He laughingly admits that in the throes of adolescence, he didn't want girls to know he still read *Jimmy Olsen*, but he was fortunately able to find like-minded collectors, who understood his passion for the hobby.

The maniacal laugh that earned Mark Hamill animated status as the Joker.

All Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.-Courtesy Warner Bros.

"I remember in Virginia just sitting in the basement of a friend's house for hours and hours reading comics, not conversing. The most you talked was, 'Hey, have you read this *Hawkman*? It's really, really good'—and we traded books."



"What kind of fool follows Jack Nicholson in *anything*?" Hamill asks rhetorically.

Now, with three children of his own, Hamill has passed on his fondness for comics, although they view the industry in a different way. His four year-old daughter enjoys being read *Archie* and *Little Lulu* at bedtime, with voice-trained dad doing all the characters like her own personal radio show. Hamill's sons, however, ages 10 and 14, are full collectors, heading straight for the bagged selections upon entering a comic book store.

Hamill sighs in paternal defeat and says, "They're concerned about the value of their books in a way I *never* was as a kid. In fact, I've tried to tell them that there's nothing wrong with acknowledging that the books can increase in value, but that's no reason to pick one title over another. Buy what you like, buy what you enjoy. There's nothing more frustrating than seeing 11-year-olds going in and buying these things that are never going to come out of the bag."

After almost 20 years as an actor, Hamill was finally able to combine his career with his hobby, first by playing the Trickster, then by laughing it up as the Joker. "One of the first letters of complaint we got after Fox started airing the series was from the mother of a kid who was really scared of the Joker, which I took as a *great*

(continued on page 62)

In this stone-age comedy, the humor's on the rocks.

By MARC SHAPIRO

Not long after he signed on as production designer on *The Flintstones*, William Sandell hung up a conspicuous sign in his workplace.

"The sign says, 'It's the Rocks, Stupid,' " recalls Sandell. "And for me it was really appropriate, because from a production designer's point-of-view, I feel the humor in *The Flintstones* is the rocks."

And on this day there's more humor in Sandell's immediate surroundings than one might expect. Sandell is standing at the bottom of a Southern California rock quarry where his creation, the TV town of Bedrock, sits in all its stony glory amid swirling mid-afternoon winds. Down a dusty dirt road and into a Sandell-designed rock oasis of muted blues, browns and pinks is the backdrop for an army of caveman and cavewoman extras who are literally rocking out. The musical group The B-52s, with the aid of *Flintstones* stars John Goodman, Elizabeth Perkins, Rick Moranis and Kyle MacLachlan, are lip-synching their way through a bouncy, techno version of the classic *Flintstones* theme for a soon-to-be-seen music video.

All Live-Action Flintstones Photos: Ron Batzdorff

Goodman is Fred, a "two-dimensional, three-fingered man," a role the *Roseanne* star seems born to play. Perkins is Fred's long-suffering wife Wilma and Moranis, naturally, is happy go-lucky Barney Rubble. MacLachlan, accustomed to sandy locations due to his *Dune* stint, plays a prehistoric yuppie. Missing from today's video line-up are Rosie O'Donnell (Betty Rubble; she's off appearing in a *Grease* revival), Halle Berry, Jonathan Winters, Richard Moll and, needless to say, the legendary Elizabeth Taylor (who plays Fred's mother-in-law).

The B-52s' music is the perfect backdrop to viewing Sandell's work. The classic open-air drive-in, for the purposes of updating, is showing George Lucas' *Tar Wars* on its big slab of a screen. Cross the street and you're confronted by a rock, wood and bone fast food joint that presents a none-too-subtle product placement tie-in with McDonald's (appropriately retitled for the occasion). This Bedrock is a tantalizing, dust-washed color display that's the perfect, quite humorous translation of the classic Hanna-Barbera animated *Flintstones* into a bigger-than-life live-action film.

Sandell, a genre veteran with such films as *RoboCop* and *Total Recall* to his credit, is delighted that somebody is getting the point.

"Our whole culture is built around the ability to make something out of materials that are malleable, like leather or wood," Sandell declares. "The Flintstones are *not* that way. They love to make everything out of rock and the humor comes from the fact that there are so many heavy things. All the weight around this movie is ridiculous and very entertaining."

It was Sandell's work on Disney's *Hocus Pocus* that brought him to the attention of Amblin Entertainment. His initial reaction to the idea of going prehistoric was surprise. "I thought the film had already been shot and was sitting on a shelf somewhere. I had been hearing about *The Flintstones* for years and thought that a whole lot of producers had tried to make it but couldn't get it off the ground."

Once Sandell realized that *The Flintstones* was actually moving into production, the designer and his army of creators went to the source for their early inspiration. "We looked at every *Flintstones* episode," chuckles Sandell with a mock groan. "And while we were looking, we were also doing a major computer catalog of *every* element of the old show. We cataloged gags, architecture, vehicles, talking animals—the whole spectrum of *Flintstones* stuff. We weren't looking to copy those things, but rather to do our homework to free ourselves up to extrapolate on those ideas and take the best of what *The Flintstones* had to offer us on a visual basis."

And what the research showed was that creating the rock-hard world of *The Flintstones* would require building from the ground up. "Early on, we realized that *nothing* was going to be off the shelf on this movie—everything had to be designed from scratch. OK, we bought a few sea shells but, otherwise, everything was done from scratch," grins Sandell.

From there, it was basically a matter of striking a balance in what the production designer describes as an off-kilter world. "Finding that balance was the big challenge. Everything is at such an odd scale in this film, but it also had to have its own sense of reality. Fred's cave isn't a *Clan of the Cave Bear* kind of cave. It's an *impression* of a rock cave."

Sandell's translation of a cartoon look to live action extended to his approach to designing Bedrock. "We thought of this Bedrock as being much more detailed than what you see on the TV show. In the TV show, Bedrock was very Hobbit-like, which worked for the cartoon, but we wanted something a little more Toon Town in look. We tried to make the architecture more Small Town, USA than a fantasy village. Things like the overall architec-

John Goodman dons the familiar big orange shirt, blue tie and no pants as beleaguered everyman Fred Flintstone.

Bedrock buddies Fred and Barney and their modern stone age families are back. This time they yabba-dabba-do it in live action on the big screen.

All Live-Action Flintstones Photos: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Universal City Studios & Amblin Entertainment

ture and the individual elements, like building corners and rooftops, had to have some kind of realistic look to them. We weren't trying to do *Willow*."

But what the *Flintstones* design team was trying to do was go back to the Stone Age, which meant introducing an array of sculpted plaster rocks, wood and bone into the movie's landscape.

"Everybody knew going in that rock would be the dominant look," says Sandell, "but I happen to love the idea of bones, and so I attempted to introduce bones into the architecture as much as possible. We went for an out-of-balance, overscaled look to the bones whenever we could. They make up parts of the buildings, and we've even managed to work the bone motif into cooking and eating utensils.

"My only complaint was that we didn't do *enough* of the bone thing. There were a number of scenes, with these big piles of dinosaur skeletons laying bleached in the sun, that didn't make the film. But since rock was the main gag, we had to go with that whenever possible."

Sandell explains that, from a production designer's standpoint, the biggest challenge was to maintain the film's color scheme, which he describes "as a muted series of tones running amuck."

Says Sandell, "That was really rough. Our characters came with preconceived colors. Wilma wears white and Fred has this wild *Jurassic Park* animal thing. We toned things down with real muted blues and pinks—colors that didn't clash with the characters. In some instances, we even made our own animal skins and printed less extravagant images on things so that they wouldn't conflict with what the actors were wearing."

Getting the *Flintstones* look exactly right led to numerous color tests, evaluating looks, colors and textures. The design process was done largely in conjunction with the director, Brian Levant.

"We would cough up a slew of designs and he would pass judgment on them. Once he gave us the OK, we felt free to take the ideas and run with them. Brian's a real *Flintstone* aficionado. He remembers every damned coffee cup in the TV series, and would ask for them too."

Sandell's job didn't end once lensing began. "Whenever we went on actual location, we would Flintstonize it. We would drop our phony boulders right in the middle of the real ones and then paint them with our own colors. We were merging our fantasy things with the real landscape and creating

"We looked at every *Flintstones* episode," chuckles production designer William Sandell, who outfitted the new Barney (Rick Moranis) and Betty (Rosie O'Donnell) with many modern rock-and-bone appliances.

Fred's better half, Wilma, is brought to very three-dimensional life by Elizabeth Perkins.

Sandell describes the color scheme in *The Flintstones* as "a muted series of tones running amuck"—a perfect playground for Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm.

our own version of reality.

"Beyond that, it was basically a matter of keeping as much of what we created in each shot as we could. We felt that for our stuff to be shown to its best advantage, each scene had to be very cluttered. Hopefully when the movie comes out, you'll be seeing a lot of our stuff."

Sandell speculates that the design will ultimately be as big an attraction in *The Flintstones* as the stars and the story. "Just look at this stuff," he says, waving his hand in a circular motion around the set. "It's a big playground. People will see this stuff and just want to run up to it, climb up on it and play. And I'm *not* just talking about people who grew up with the show. There's just something very enticing about all this. None of this stuff is making any great statements. It's just a very effective interpretation of what *The Flintstones* requires and I think it really works on a very fun level."

Sandell's fleeting memories of his other genre work is centered on challenges met and overcome. "When I did *RoboCop*, the big thing at the time was to try and find a design niche different from *Terminator*, which was, for a long time, the film all the designers looked at. In the case of *Total Recall*, it was a matter of a bunch of fans of *Blade Runner* and *Outland* who got together and created our own thing. *Total Recall* was probably the hardest job I ever had. After *Total Recall*, nothing can faze me. *Hocus Pocus* was simply a fun time, dealing with supernatural and fantasy images and basically letting our imaginations run wild."

With *The Flintstones* in release shortly, Sandell is looking for his next project, but he admits that his own taste is making this search "kind of tough. I'm not averse to doing sequels," he says in response to the report that a *Total Recall* sequel and another *ALIEN* installment are in the works, "but I'm not really keen on all this cyberpunk stuff. I would just like to do something different.

"Artistically, I can honestly say I'm satisfied. I've been doing witch movies, robot movies and now *The Flintstones*. I'm particular. The creative challenge must be there. I would never do many of the movies coming out. They might be better movies than many of the things I've done, but they wouldn't be as interesting to do." (65)

All Flintstones Animation Art & Characters: Copyright 1993, 1990 Hanna-Barbera Productions Inc.

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton

MAXIMUM MYTHS

All Maximortal Characters & Art: Copyright 1992, 1993 Rick Veitch

By HARLEY JEBENS

Rick Veitch dreams of heroes most super & justice for the creators of comics past.

Rick Veitch is a dreamer, which is a good thing, because the project the writer/artist is about to embark on is a chronicle, in comic book form, of his own dreams.

Rare Bit Fiends first appeared as a back-up strip running along the bottom third of Veitch's *Maximortal* mini-series, the first graphic novel in Veitch's projected five-novel King Hell Heroica project. *Maximortal*, and *Bratpack* before it (King Hell Heroica part four, for those keeping score at home), takes a hard-edged look at the *Superman* mythos and the faded icons and stale conventions of the superhero genre. It also re-tells the history of the comic book industry—as filtered through Veitch's consciousness.

Rare Bit Fiends, however, is Veitch's recounting of his own dreams. He's preparing to release *Roarin' Rick's Rare Bit Fiends* (capitalizing on the sobriquet he gave himself for Image comics' *1963* project) as a monthly black-and-white book.

Meryl and George Winston run across their own version of a bundle of joy in the desert, but all isn't as it should be in the storybooks.

Veitch says, "Going back to when I was a kid, I always had interesting dreams, and sometimes I would have what I would call 'big dreams,' which would seem to have depths of meaning associated with them or would be very powerful experiences to me as a child. When I got into my early 20s, I went through the crisis that most people go through when they're coming out of adolescence. And I was *real* confused. I was kind of a mess at that point. I took up dream work, read a lot of Carl Jung, and started writing down my dreams.

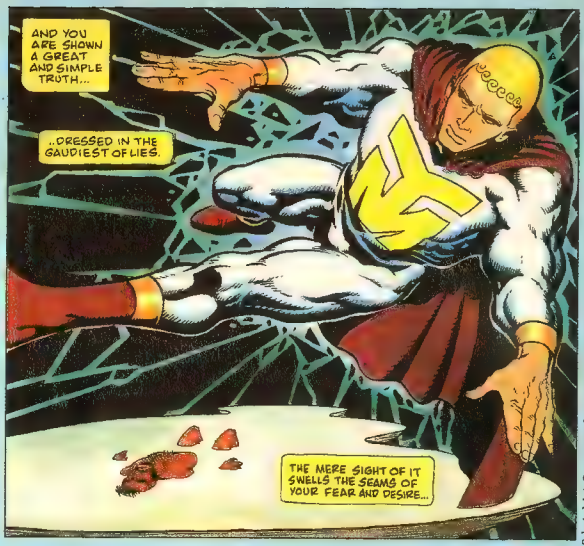
"Since then, on and off, I've written them down, and created prose diaries of my dreams. I've always paid attention to them, even if I wasn't writing them down. I always tried to remember them for a while, and understand them the best I could.

"*Rare Bit Fiends* started in 1991 when Scott McCloud [creator of *Zot!* and author of *Understanding Comics*] issued a challenge to a number of his fellow cartoonists to draw a 24-page comic in 24 hours. He did one, Steve

All Art: Rick Veitch

Bissette did one, Dave Sim did one and Kevin Eastman did one. I was gonna do one, but I had this other idea, one that I had wanted to do for many years: a dream diary in comic book form. But, I had never been able to get it together. And, I just thought, 'Well, this is the way to do it. Except instead of doing 24 pages in 24 hours, I'll do it in 10 minutes a day. So, I would wake up in the morning and jot down notes of what I had dreamed. Some time during the day, I would sit down with a marker and a sketchbook and draw my dreams into comic book form. I must have turned 150 dreams into comic books, which I published as these little black-and-white ashcans and gave to friends.

"When I did, virtually all my friends came back and said, 'This is the greatest thing you've ever done.' I would reply, 'Yeah, but look at it, it's all sketchy and crummy. It looks awful.' And they said, 'It's just fascinating to read. We love it.' I got a lot out of doing it. I was totally hooked on it. Even when I was just completely exhausted from working on my other jobs, I would somehow find the time every day to do it."


AND YOU ARE SHOWN A GREAT AND SIMPLE TRUTH...
...DRESSED IN THE GAUDIEST OF LIES.
THE MERE SIGHT OF IT SWELLS THE SEAMS OF YOUR FEAR AND DESIRE...

Selected Art: Courtesy Rick Veitch

Vision quest—the path to enlightenment and a gateway into the future. El Guano spies the savior of humanity, True-Man.

With *Maximortal* ending, Veitch decided to do *Rare Bit Fiends* before going on to the next King Hell Heroica volume.

"I started doing it, and I just couldn't believe the speed with which I was turning out pages. I'm literally scripting, pencilling and inking six pages a week, which is just fantastic for me. I'm feeling as close or closer to my art than I've felt in a long time. The nature of the work is much like a painter working—you're in a deep dialogue with yourself. More so than when you're doing a commercial superhero comic, which is probably more craft-oriented than fine art-oriented. *Rare Bit Fiends* definitely is that for me. It's a very organic art form. To me, it comes from the deepest depths that there are."

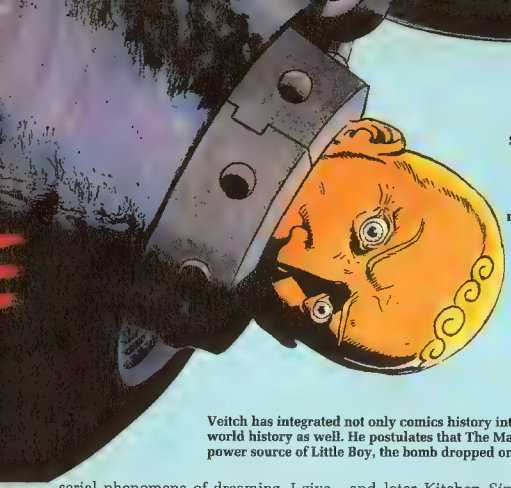
Veitch intends to publish his dreams in a monthly, black-and-white, *Cerebus*-type format, possibly for summer release. "I just want to do it for as long and as well as I can, and hope that I can find an audience that appreciates it.

"Every Monday, I take my notes from the week before and I pick five or six dreams that seem like they would make interesting comics. Certain dreams are very private, and I'm not gonna share them with a huge audience, but with most of the stuff, I try to be as completely honest and straightforward as I can be.

"I've tried to focus on the dreams I've had about comics and their creators. That's a pretty tightly knit community, and those are the people I work with, so it's only natural that I should dream about those people. For instance, I've had powerful dreams that had Alan Moore and Steve Bissette in them—especially when we were working on *1963*. Those dreams reflect, I think, the hopes and aspirations we had for that series, what we were trying to do with it. In that sense, *Rare Bit Fiends* is a useful *1963* artifact."

Veitch says, "What's interesting about *Rare Bit Fiends*, and what's different about *my* dream comic when compared to other dream comics—what Jim Woodring is doing, what Moebius has done, and what Neil Gaiman is doing with *Sandman*—is that I try to offer representations of the

Hollywood isn't for everybody, and so learns Sidney Wallace, ex-stuntman, victim of the Maximortal's lethal whim.



Veitch has integrated not only comics history into his books, but world history as well. He postulates that The Maximortal was the power source of Little Boy, the bomb dropped on Japan.

serial phenomena of dreaming. I give you a month's dreams all strung together, so you begin to see a much larger cross-section of what's going on in my mind than *any* single dream might give you. The serial nature of dreams has much to teach us about how ideas and concepts and emotions are...digested by the human psyche. Friends of mine say it has kind of an addictive quality to it, which is exactly what I'm hoping."

Each issue of *Rare Bit Fiends* will contain several of Veitch's illustrated dreams, as well as a "celebrity dream corner," where other comic creators will illustrate their dreams. Already on tap is Dave Sim's "Zelda Cafe" and Bissette's "Jurassic Parking Lot." Gaiman has submitted a one-page dream comic to Veitch, and the *Sandman* scribe is working on another piece.

Veitch has put a great deal of thinking into his dreaming. He says, "Dreams are very much an art form that we all create. We all share in it. Every night we go to sleep and spend two or three hours creating these little stories in our heads. On one level, it seems chaotic and crazy. But as you come to understand how symbolism works, and how the human psyche is structured, you can correlate how the chaotic, symbolic nature of the stories tends to give you a holistic picture of the human psyche dreaming them."

It's easy to see that Rick Veitch is a dreamer. But he also has his feet planted firmly on terra firma. He learned the business of comics publishing during his work-for-hire days as a writer/artist with Marvel and DC; his *Bratpack* (CS #14) and *Maximortal* co-publishing efforts with first Tundra and later Kitchen Sink; and Image's *1963* project assembled by Veitch, Moore and Bissette. With all this experience, Veitch now feels he can take on all the duties of running King Hell, the company he formed to publish his own work. Or as he puts it, "take King Hell *completely* self-publishing!"

I WOULDA GIVEN UP A LONG TIME AGO IF IT WASN'T FOR HIM! I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY PUBLISHERS CAN'T SEE HIS POTENTIAL!
YOU THINK MAYBE HE NEEDS A MASK?

In *The Maximortal*, Veitch has mirrored the real-life tragedy of Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster by creating True-Man's masterminds, Jerry Spiegal and Joe Schumacher.

Maximortal and the upcoming chapters in the King Hell Heroica deal directly with the myths of superheroism. Though you have ambi-sexual giants from outer space coming to Earth and raping Russian trappers to produce the Maximortal offspring that will be named Wesley Winston but come to be known as True-Man (*Maximortal* #1), there's also the story of Jerry Spiegal and Joe Schumacher. Spiegal and Schumacher's comic-book creation, True-Man, is stolen from them by failed Hollywood stuntman-turned-unscrupulous comic-book mogul Sidney "Ball-less" Wallace.

I FIGURED YOU AND YOUR BUDDY WOULD BE ON THE WAY TO BOOT CAMP BY NOW!
PLEASE, SID. ALL I WANT TO DO IS DRAW. I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE OTHER STUFF.
I CAN GET THE BOOK DONE ON TIME AND IT CAN LOOK ANY WAY YOU WANT. I WON'T MAKE TROUBLE, I SWEAR.
JUST GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE.
HMMM WELL, WE MIGHT TAKE YOU BACK ON A TRIAL BASIS, AT A LOWER PAGE RATE OF COURSE...
THAT IS, IF YOU CAN ANSWER A SIMPLE STRAIGHTFORWARD QUESTION CORRECTLY.
ANYTHING, SID.
WHO CREATED TRUE-MAN?

Even after losing his testicles in a parachute accident, Sid Wallace still had the *cajones* to steal True-Man from Spiegal and Schumacher.

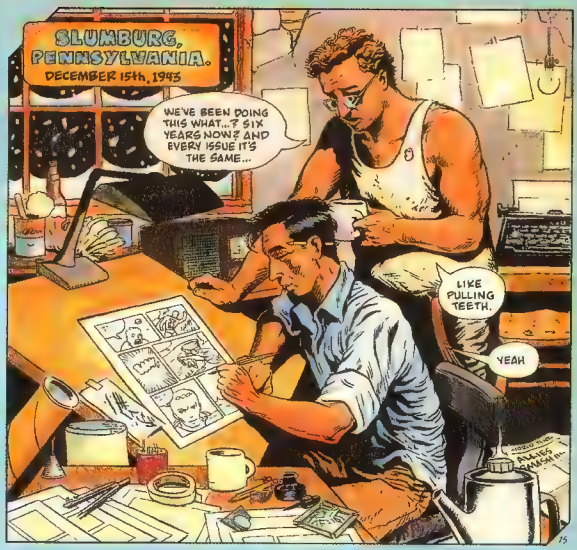
NO, NO! A MASK IS ALL WRONG FOR SOMEONE LIKE HIM.
HE STANDS FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE. HE'D NEVER HIDE HIS FACE BEHIND A MASK.
NOT TRUE-MAN!

(Wallace earned that nasty nickname during an encounter with the Maximortal that put an end to his Hollywood career and robbed him of his manhood.) Schumacher and Spiegal's situation parallels that of Superman's creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, while Wallace's rise mirrors that of one Walt Disney.

It seems the Maximortal is brought to life by "the collective unconscious mind of mankind" as one reader put it, and the belief that people such as El Guano (who seek to capture True-Man's power) and Spiegal (who seeks to capture True-Man's essence in comic book form) bestow upon him. No less an authority than Albert Einstein (himself a character in Veitch's chronicle) scribbles on a blackboard, "Reality equals Belief times Consciousness squared."

The fantastic career of the Maximortal (it was he, and *not* the atomic bomb, that destroyed Hiroshima) contrasts with the harsh existence that Spiegal and Schumacher must endure once their creation is taken from them.

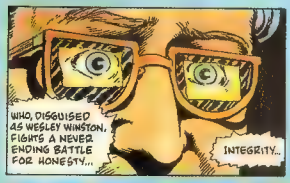
Veitch says, "I fictionalize and slightly exaggerate some of the scenes to make it work as a comic book, and especially a satirical, black-humor comic book, but just about everything [that happens to Spiegal and Schumacher] is based on things that *really* happened.

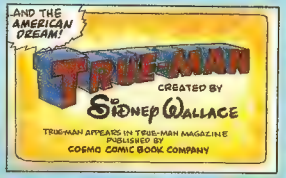

SLUMBURG, PENNSYLVANIA.
DECEMBER 15th, 1943
WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS WHAT...? SIX YEARS NOW? AND EVERY ISSUE IT'S THE SAME...
LIKE PULLING TEETH.
YEAH

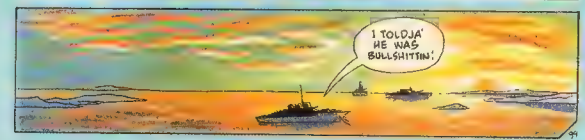
Design & Layout: Jim McLarnon

"Siegel and Shuster got really screwed, as bad as anyone could," says Veitch. "In so doing, they established the whole history of creators being screwed in comics."

"Siegel and Shuster got really screwed, as bad as anyone could get screwed. In so doing, they established the whole history of creators being screwed in comics. It's now so endemic to the structure of these corporations that they can't change it. The only way they can change it is to throw Siegel and Shuster like $20,000 a year and get them to sign non-disclosure forms so that the *real* truth



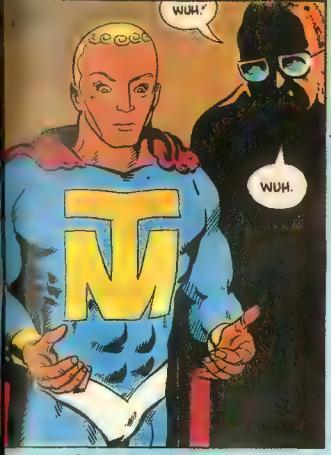

AND THE AMERICAN DREAM!
TRUE-MAN
CREATED BY
SIDNEY WALLACE
TRUE-MAN APPEARS IN TRUE-MAN MAGAZINE PUBLISHED BY COSMO COMIC BOOK COMPANY



What is it like to have your dreams, your ideas, your creation stolen from you wholesale? It's even worse when you're faced with it every waking day.

With *The Maximortal*, writer/artist Rick Veitch takes an unflinching look into the conventions of superheroes and the business surrounding them.

SKRITCH
SKRITCH
SKRITCH



In the second Maximortal saga, Spiegal plays a Pa Kent role, helping raise a teen hero.

Home of True-Man by Sidney Wallace") and was ready to jump. His suicide attempt was thwarted by the arrival of the Maximortal, whom Spiegal had always assumed to be fictional. At the mini-series' end, Spiegal and Wesley have disappeared, leaving a fuming Sidney Wallace behind.

There are three more books planned in the Maximortal saga. "The second one will be the Maximortal's teenage years," Veitch explains. "There will be a little town like Smallville, and he'll live there. One of the interesting things is that Spiegal will end up playing the Pa Kent role. I'm going to try to explore, as fully as I can, the Maximortal's emerging sexuality, enhanced with super-powers and seen through the prism of his own alien mentality. He really doesn't relate as a human being yet. But with Spiegal playing the Pa Kent role, what I'm hoping to do is see that relationship between those two characters help form Maximortal into the person who will become a real adult superhero. That will be the third book in the sequence. Of course, the fourth is *Bratpack*. The fifth would be the ending, the Maximortal back on Earth, aware of who and what he is, and what he would do to the planet and all the people on it."

Veitch says, "I see Sidney Wallace and J. Edgar Hoover working together. It's funny, Walt Disney never had anything to do with Superman [eventually animated by Disney's rivals, Max & Dave Fleischer], but, because he became this big-time cartoon magnate and owned one of the other great cartoon archetypes of the 20th century, I used him as my template for my comic book publisher. And I was always planning this thing about him meeting up with the FBI. Then this book, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince*, came out, claiming that Disney *had* been a secret agent for the FBI, and actually allowed Disneyland to be used as a base of operations. And he reported on other Hollywood figures during the Red Scare of the '50s. I'm moving in that direction with the Wallace character."

Neil Gaiman wrote, in his introduction to the *Bratpack* collected edition: "Rick Veitch cares deeply about superheroes. He thinks they matter. That they're important. That they tell us things about ourselves."

Veitch doesn't disagree with that statement. "I think the reason that people enjoy superheroes so much is because they reflect an important part of our psychological makeup that we might not consciously understand, but that we respond to when we read it.

"On one level, it's very infantile. This very infantile need for total power. Then, there's a heavy, unfortunately mostly subliminal, erotic presence to superheroes. I say unfortunately subliminal because the way comic books have been censored in our country since the '50s has forced one of the most powerful aspects of the superhero mythos, which is its erotic side, into a hidden role. I would like to see that opened up quite a bit. In fact, I play with it as much as I can in *Maximortal* and *Bratpack*.

"What superheroes point toward, in a modern sense, is the future of man. We're coming very close to a point where it's not going to be completely impossible to have superpowers. There will come a time when there will be ways to change our bodies, or possibly enhance our mental abilities, through technology and genetic manipulation. This is a potential reality that our society is facing, and I think superheroes operate as a barometer of how

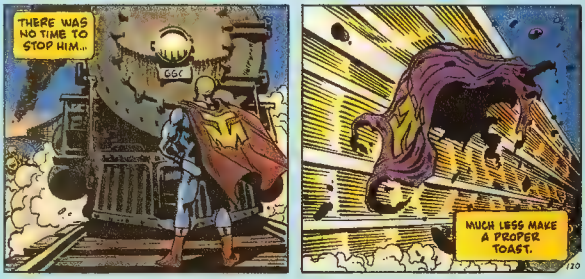
I FREEZE AS SIMPLE LINE WORK. THEN THE LATE NEVE CUT AND THE COLORS FLATTEN IN.
HEH! GOT'I YOU, ALBERT! THIS IS N-S SWIM?!
THAT'S RIGHT BACK ONE OF US CRAM A BARREL OF ANTIMATTER OR ANTIGRAV OR ACTION VACUUM OR SOMETHING THAT MAKES HIM VIRTUALLY INVULNERABLE!
SO THEORY IS QUICK MATTER INTO ANYTHING
BUT... WHY CHOOSE TO BE TRAPPED IN THIS?

The Maximortal's metamorphosis into True-Man baffled even the most preeminent of scientific minds, Albert Einstein.

people are feeling about this approaching historical epoch. It's one of the few art forms today that deals with it in *any* kind of depth at all."

Another of Veitch's explorations of the conventions of the superhero genre was *1963*. "The original idea was to redo something along the lines of *Swamp Thing*, but neither Alan, Steve nor myself were really interested. Alan wasn't interested in doing *anything* like a modern superhero. But he always had in his head—he talked about it a number of times over the years—to go back and do superheroes when they were almost in a state of grace, where everything was sweet, happy and wonderful, and it was all *fantastic*. Like comics were when *we* were little children. So, he began to sketch this thing out to us, and Steve and I started

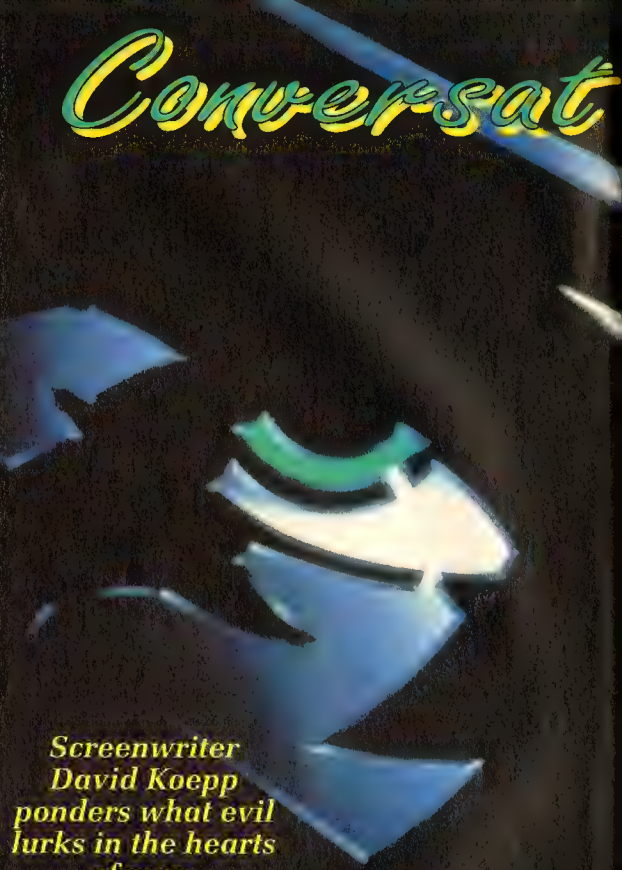
(continued on page 64)



True-Man had become a media property, and actor Byron Reeves took to the silver screen as the legend. But he thought he *was* his character, to disastrous results.

Conversat

When Wisconsin-born screenwriter David Koepp first tackled scripting chores on the long-planned Universal Pictures adaptation of Walter B. Gibson's classic crimebuster, he was little-known, if not virtually unknown. Over The Shadow's *four-year incubation, he has quietly begun racking up impressive credits such as* Death Becomes Her, Carlito's Way *and last summer's mega-hit* Jurassic Park, *co-written with Michael Crichton, until he has arguably become one of the most promising writers in Hollywood. With* The Shadow *poised to dominate summer 1994, Koepp (pronounced "Kep") agrees to tear aside the cloak of secrecy surrounding Lamont Cranston's eagerly-awaited return to the silver screen.*



Screenwriter David Koepp ponders what evil lurks in the hearts of men.

COMICS SCENE: How did you come to script *The Shadow*?

DAVID KOEPP: Martin Bregman, the producer, was looking for a writer for *The Shadow* and had read some scripts I had written. He had *The Shadow Scrapbook* and said, 'Read this and tell me what you think.' And I remembered The Shadow. When I was a kid, they ran it on Sunday nights on *The CBS Mystery Theater*, hosted by E.G. Marshall. They played a lot of the old Orson Welles/Agnes Moorehead ones. I loved it. So, I read the *Scrapbook* and got a lot of background I hadn't been aware of. I just felt like I got it. For me, the thing that made it interesting was, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows." I felt, *why* does this guy *know* what evil lurks in the hearts of men? Is it because he knows the evil in his *own* heart?

Another thing I remember from the radio show was, "The Shadow is, in reality, Lamont Cranston, who years ago while traveling in the Orient, discovered the ability to cloud men's minds." I wanted to see that and bring back a foe who could match that.

CS: You picked a great one in Shiwan Khan. You must have read at least one of Walter Gibson's Shadow versus Shiwan Khan novels.

KOEPP: Yeah, I read them all. There were four. I thought he and the Voodoo Master were two of the villains who could fight The Shadow on his own terms. They would give him more of a challenge. To have him run around busting ordinary crime rings—the criminals just seemed so overmatched. We have a little of that in the beginning, then the real menace shows himself.

CS: Why did you choose Khan over the Voodoo Master?

KOEPP: The thing that made me want Khan was that I knew in the first film—and God willing there will be more—it would give us a chance to tie the villain into The Shadow's past which was what we were going to create. In subsequent films, other villains can come in.

CS: The Voodoo Master?

KOEPP: Probably.

CS: Is this an adaptation of the first Shiwan Khan novel?

KOEPP: No, it's a new story using Shiwan Khan. We use his entrance in the museum from the first novel [*The Golden Master*], which I thought was terrific. You could lay it down on paper just as it was. But Shiwan Khan's specific goal in this country is a new story. You can guess his goal in general—dividing and conquering and so forth—but the way he plans to go about it is a new story.

CS: Did you have any concerns about invoking the Fu Manchu cliché, the stereotyped "Yellow Peril" created by Sax Rohmer?

KOEPP: Yeah, but Shiwan Khan's such a great character I tried to put them aside. Had we made him a typical Fu Manchu, that would have been offensive. I also didn't feel that we could let the handcuffs of political correctness prevent us from using a wonderful, colorful villain. The key, of course, was in casting an Asian actor who would take special pains to see that the character was a *real* person. And John Lone will bring that. In fact, there's one idea he had—that Khan in one scene be dressed in a business suit, and cut his hair and clean himself up. So there's a scene after his entrance where Shiwan Khan

ions in Shadow

By WILL MURRAY

The film's villain is The Shadow's greatest foe, Shiwan Khan (John Lone). Says Koepp, "It's a clash of the titans."

All Shadow photos: Keith Nelson

For screenwriter David Koepp, the hardest part of translating *The Shadow* to screen was creating a myth.

does what anybody who comes to New York would do—he goes out and buys some clothes! Just that one touch is really wonderful and unexpected.

CS: Margo Lane is a pretty one-dimensional character. What did you do to make her work in the film?

KOEPP: I tried to imagine what a connection would be between Cranston and Margo Lane. Other than "friend and companion" which kind of calls in to question Cranston's sexuality. Perhaps one in every however many of us have some psychic ability ourselves, that we may understand or develop, or we may not. Margo Lane does. She's never aware of it, and probably would have gone her whole life never being aware of it had she not passed into the orbit of Lamont

Cranston, someone who knew it and understood. This draws her to him and him to her. She grows to understand it as the film goes on.

CS: Is there much of a romance between Margo and Cranston?

KOEPP: There is. You know, Margo has always been a secondary character. It's *not* her movie. She's important to him certainly. But, primarily, this is a battle between The Shadow and himself, and The Shadow and Shiwan Khan. This is sort of a clash of the titans. I think Margo fits in rather neatly, but there's not always much for the girl to do when the boys start smacking each other around.

CS: Why did you include so many of The Shadow's pulp agents?

KOEPP: For me, one of the appeals of the agents in the books was the feeling that the reader has that "*I* could be one." The agents and the system of communications and their interconnectedness was really fascinating. That was one of the best parts of the novels. It also really differentiates The Shadow from other superheroes.

CS: It's surprising to see that you included the fairly obscure Dr. Roy Tam, but left out The Shadow's chief agent, Harry Vincent.

KOEPP: Harry Vincent was in my early 149-page draft. The Shadow saved him from suicide and put him up in a hotel. But Vincent was replaced by Dr. Tam and the suicide on the bridge became an attempted murder on the bridge because we wanted someone who was connected to this plot.

CS: That's obviously the opening to the first Shadow novel, *The Living Shadow*.

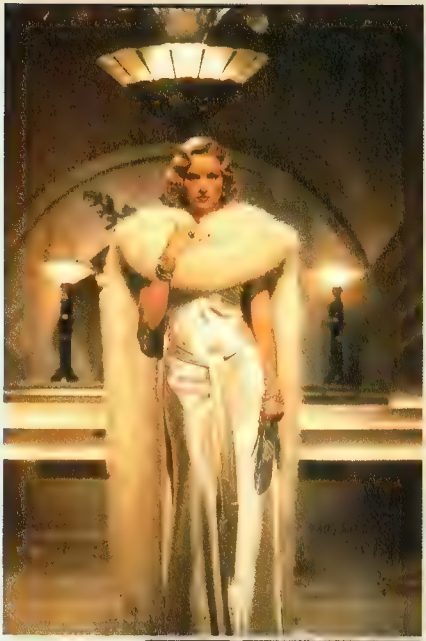
KOEPP: I love the way that first novel begins. But I didn't know what to do with Harry Vincent after that opening sequence. I think I brought him back in to take The Shadow to an auction in Chinatown—the story was more complicated then—but he was sort of befuddled and in the grip of circumstances, and we didn't get a chance to get into him. Which is why we cut him. If we're going to bring in characters, let's *use* them.

CS: Did you watch any of the vintage Shadow film features?

KOEPP: I didn't see any of the films, no. It's not that I didn't bother; they're not on video. I didn't pursue it as hard as I might because it's the same as when a writer comes to a screenplay that somebody else might have tried. You don't want to read the old ones because you want to take *your* shot.

CS: Did you read any of the unproduced *Shadow* scripts that came before your version?

KOEPP: I read them after I had done a couple of drafts of mine. There was one by Leslie Newman, and Howard Franklin did one with Bob Zemeckis. Zemeckis was going to direct. They were pretty good, but I would have gone a different way. I don't want to criticize anyone else's work.



Cranston's constant companion, Margo Lane (Penelope Ann Miller), romances the hero, but "it's not her movie."

The Shadow: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.
All Shadow Photos & Icon: Copyright 1994 Universal City Studios, Inc.

Koepp believes that emphasizing the dark side of Lamont Cranston (Alec Baldwin) makes him a more interesting character.

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton

CS: Have the aftershocks from your success with *Jurassic Park* stopped reverberating yet?

KOEPP: It's just so overwhelming. The accomplishment of Dennis Muren and the ILM guys is just not to be believed. When I started, I asked Steven Spielberg what my limitations were. He said, "Your imagination." That was pretty challenging. So then, I would write a line like, "The T-rex runs down the Gallimimus and devours it in a cloud of dust." Which takes me about 30 seconds to write. And I would sit back and look at this and say, "How on Earth would *anyone* ever realize this?" But they did. Without exception. I saw it for the first time and I thought, "Now you can do *anything* you want."

CS: Did you know all that when you started scripting, or did the technology have to catch up with the script?

KOEPP: No. Dennis Muren said when the film was done, he wished he could do some of the first FX over again, because they learned so much in the two-and-a-half years that they were working. The FX they did last are far superior to the ones they did in the beginning.

CS: Did they have a specific menu of dinosaurs in mind that you had to include?

KOEPP: Yeah. Spielberg said at the outset, "We have several sequences that we want in the film and if you can't handle that, let us know." So those were the grounds. Fortunately, I felt the sequences they had in mind were fantastic. The T-rex attack in the

Studying The Shadow, Koepp wondered how he knew what evil lurks in the hearts of men. "Is it because he knows the evil in his *own*?"

Shadow agent Dr. Roy Tam also shows up. Koepp revised the opening bridge scene from the very first novel, *The Living Shadow*, to feature Tam.

Incorporating a museum scene from the first Shiwan Khan novel, *The Golden Master*, Koepp gave the villain a memorable movie entrance.

road is, image for image, the way Spielberg pitched it to me, just stunning. And I tried to be respectful of the fact that other people had been working on the film for several years, making models, and I was really just a hired gun.

CS: One change you made that many questioned was turning the cold, calculating John Hammond into a fuzzy, grandfatherly type. Why did you do that?

KOEPP: There was a particular moment in the book when his grandchildren were out in the park and as far as he knows were dead or dying, and he's still concerned about the ice cream he's having with dinner. I just *didn't* believe it. And I thought that would be even harder to believe in a movie, and it would undermine our attempts to create some reality, because there was so much the audience had to swallow. Once I made that decision, the character changed.

CS: Tell us about *Death Becomes Her*.

KOEPP: That was a lot of fun. I wrote that with Martin Donovan, the guy I did my first film, *Apartment Zero*, with. It was just this very bizarre idea we had. We wrote what we thought was going to be an unsaleable spec script. When I came to Universal, they liked it and it became part of my deal. When Bob Zemeckis got involved, it became a much bigger thing than we anticipated. I think it's a very good film, but there are things about it that don't quite work as well as we had hoped. What was great was we were really out on a limb and we took some chances. We made something that nobody could really categorize, and I feel a lot of satisfaction about that.

CS: You started scripting *The Shadow* in 1989. What kind of problems did you have to solve over four years of rewrites?

KOEPP: The hardest thing for me was getting down the Shadow's dark side. You're creating a myth. That's *not* easy. It requires the most depth of thought. The climactic scene was very tough. That took a while to get right. We went through several alternatives. Movie climaxes are so hard anyway. This is a big action film and it has to build to a big, action film climax, and *everything* has been done. What do you do when everything has been done?

CS: What made you decide to emphasize Lamont Cranston's dark side?

KOEPP: It makes him more interesting. We've seen several superhero films, and I wanted to distinguish ours from the others. It gives him a little more complexity.

CS: Is your Shadow a projection of the real Cranston, a separate persona or the true Lamont Cranston?

KOEPP: That's the dilemma. I think the power comes from the darkness in him. There's a passing reference in the novels that in the East they referred to The Shadow as Ying Ko, and I wondered why. And it wasn't really explored. Or was it?

CS: Ying Ko is simply Chinese for The Shadow. Just as he was known in Central America as—

KOEPP: La Sombre.

CS: It's just another facet of the dark jewel that is The Shadow. In the film is Ying Ko another of his many names?

KOEPP: No. We present Ying Ko as another side, another identity. It's what he starts out as in the film. He is Ying Ko.

CS: Do you see this as primarily a fantasy film, a detective film or even a romantic adventure romp?

KOEPP: All of them. Mostly I saw it as an adventure. I kept *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in mind Aside from being one of my favorite films, it's a similar period and it's just a great adventure. It takes a tremendous character with a wonderful villain and sends us on an adventure we want to go on, with all those elements that you mentioned.

CS: It's well known that The Shadow was one of the seminal influences on Batman. What did you have to do to differentiate the two characters?

KOEPP: When you look at it superficially, you have this wealthy reclusive millionaire in a New York-like city—in *our* case, it is New York—who has this split personality and goes out and fights evil. So there are incredible similarities. You think briefly about changing your character, but then you realize many of these superheroes came out of the same era and the same social circumstances. It was accepted

(continued on page 58)

I saw Trencher fraggin' Santa Claus (budda-budda) underneath the mistletoe last night. Oooo, Keith Giffen you're a vewy baaad boy.

TRENCHER WARFARE

Keith Giffen returns to [illegible] while not

By DARCY SULLIVAN

"I don't think that I'll ever stop reinventing myself," says writer/artist Giffen.

Keith Giffen is halfway through today's tirade on what went wrong in comics last year. "Many people fell into short-term thinking when the speculators came in," he charges. "They were grabbing whatever super-hot fan favorite came rolling down the pike and hoping, 'If we take out a big enough ad and get enough hype, we can sell umpteen million copies; we've got ours, screw the rest of the world.' "

There's more. Lots more. Don't get him started on cover enhancements or comics without stories or polybags, the target of Giffen's recent "Frag the Bag" campaign. Whatever you do, don't ask him about the current practice, followed by most comics publishers, of not accepting returns from retailers of unsold comics. You already asked him? Uh oh...

"I believe *all* comic books should be returnable," he opines. "Retailers are considered the least important link in the chain, and that drives me crazy. We ought to start thinking of *them*, instead of creating circumstances that almost encourage them to go under."

When Giffen talks comics, opinions elbowing their way through his thick New York accent, he sounds every inch the maverick. He's as far from embracing the industry's status quo as his characters, who range from the abrasive Lobo to the too-nutty-to-live Heckler. Giffen's tide-bucking even extends to his artwork, the oddest stuff outside alternative comics. "Keith always wants to push the envelope," says publisher Dave Elliott.

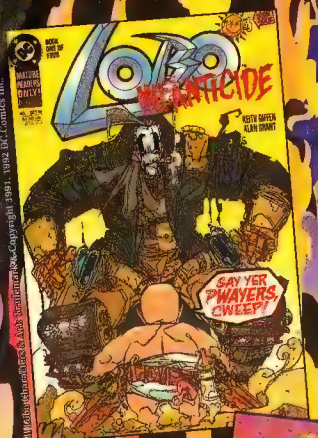
So, renegade or not, Giffen is in big demand. "Every comic company you can think of has called me in the last four days, offering me a dog book to see if I can save it," he says. "Sales are plummeting, and the publishers have realized that comics have to be more than surface flash. I think I've proven that I can tell a pretty good story and hold readers on a book."

These days, Giffen can choose his projects. He's redefining the Kirbyverse for Topps, reshaping *Supreme* for Image and guiding a few more books into uncharted waters.

He's also helping launch Blackball Comics with *The Trencher Guide to Comics*, a good-natured slam dance through the industry. The book could become a *cause celebré*, vaulting Giffen's Trencher onto the fatuous Hot Heroes lists. Or it could just piss people off. Giffen never knows *how* his jokes are going to go over. "It's interest-

All Trencher Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Keith Giffen

Photo: Greg W. Myers



All characters featured in this publication, Copyright 1991, 1992 DC Comics Inc.

The line doesn't exist that Giffen won't dive over with reckless abandon.

(Sing to tune of Toys 'R' Us jingle.) Guns, grenades and basketball games, *Trencher's* the neatest comic book there is—Gee whiz!

All Trencher Colorist: Lovern Kindzierski

Art: Simon Bisley

"I came up with the *Lobo Paramilitary Christmas Special*," says Giffen, "so DC could hand it back to me and say, 'Are you crazy?' And they published it."

ing," he says, "in an industry called comics, how few people have a sense of humor."

You've gotta have a sense of humor to enjoy Giffen's books. In fact, you better have a sense of humor if you are a character *in* them. Because odds are, you're going down. Hard.

Take Gideon, the star of *Trencher*, who combines the traits of two of Giffen's favorite characters, Lobo and Ambush Bug. To do his job—repossessing souls that have been wrongly reincarnated—Gideon occupies a lumbering body that's just as indestructible as Lobo's. But like Ambush Bug, he tends to get blown up a lot. And dropped off buildings. Jim Valentino's Shadowhawk even swung from Trencher's intestine. Talk about no respect.

Giffen has skimped on the origin-type details. We do know that Gideon occupies a Sapien 2000 chassis, that he and the body are dead, that there are other Trenchers (though not on Earth) and that Gideon is on his third tour of trenching duty, the first two being in ancient Egypt and World War II. We know his dispatcher, Phoebe, nags him constantly via a communications device on his wrist. But who is/was Gideon, and how did he get this crummy job? "This sounds odd, but I don't like to plan things too far ahead," Giffen says with gruff nonchalance.

Trencher, he is quick to remind us, is a parody. "It had the trappings of what seemed to be popular at the time it came out," says Giffen. "But if you read it, it's thumbing its nose at the current scene."

Nose-thumbing, as Giffen knows well, has never been a surefire strategy for success in comics. Certainly *Trencher* has already taken its lumps. Despite a boost from the first three issues of *Images of Shadowhawk*, which co-starred Gideon, *Trencher* got the boot along with a number of other books during Image's 1993 retrenching. Giffen admits *Trencher* dipped below the 150,000 sales mark, one official reason given for the cancellation, but he's not sure that was why it got axed.

"I think the original Image guys had rough experiences with some of the creators they brought in," Giffen says. "It was getting tough to keep an eye on everything. I think they decided, 'This is getting out of hand—let's scalp these books so we can get this ship a bit tighter.' The truth is, if you held a gun to my head and said, 'Give me the exact reason right now,' I would have to say I still don't know."

The cancellation left *Trencher* #5 in limbo, although Image solicited it before pulling the plug. (That issue may be published in a *Trencher* trade paperback.) Giffen hooked up with Dave

Elliott, an editor who had just had the rug pulled out from under *him* when Kevin Eastman sold/dissolved the comics company Tundra, the British branch of which Elliott ran. Giffen suggested Elliott publish *Trencher*.

Elliott started Blackball Comics as a result, recruiting other artists such as Simon Bisley and Kevin O'Neill; their work now rubs shoulders with *Trencher* in the monthly *Blackball Comics* anthology. "Blackball's a home for characters who are out of place at other companies," says Elliott. Under the Blackball aegis, Trencher marched back in time for the *Trencher X-Mas Bites Holiday Blow-Out*. Well, not quite in time: It didn't come out until January 1994. Some guys just can't catch a break.

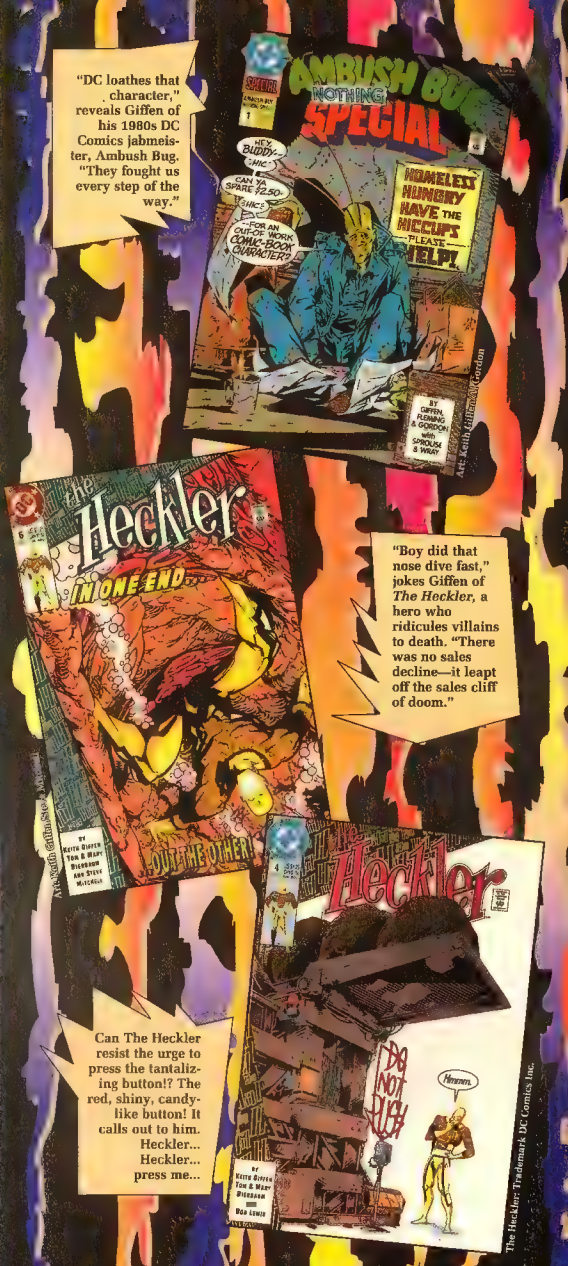
While Trencher waits for his own series, he's rocking the boat in *Blackball Comics* and especially in *The Trencher Guide to Comics*. (The *Guide* is the flipside of *Trencher Goes to Japan*, in which our soul man takes on a Godzilla-esque Tokyo-basher.) Giffen's lampooned the comics industry before –see 1993's *Lobo Convention Special*—but this time the corporate muzzle is off. Thus, you get pieces like "A Penny Saved is a Fanboy Burned," an exploration of paper costs and profit margins that should make a few publishers blush.

For maximum hoo hah, check out the results of the first Biggest Jerk in Comics Open, the most interesting fan poll since the "Kill Robin" brouhaha. Giffen says he's having a loving cup trophy made for the winner, but he won't be handing it out in public. "I don't want to embarrass anyone any more than I already have," he demurs.

And, for all his trademark blaster, Giffen *can* be diplomatic. When asked whom *he* would have voted for, he says, "Myself, for running the contest and promoting it in an ad with three glaring typos."

The Trencher Guide to Comics is just Giffen's latest act of provocation. The man who coined the phrase "Bite me, fanboy" is constantly pushing fans, goading editors and setting himself up for the big fall. His idea of fun includes going out in a blaze of glory: "My favorite athlete is the 'agony of defeat' guy," he says, referring to a skier shown wiping out spectacularly during the intro to ABC's *Wide World of Sports*.

Remember that Giffen created Lobo, the foul-mouthed brute who looks like the fifth member of KISS. Giffen says the character (then called Lunatic) was in the portfolio he showed DC when he came over from Marvel. Roger Slifer gave Lobo his name and put him in *Omega Men*; Alan Grant, in *L.E.G.I.O.N. '91*, "layered that Brit sen-


"DC loathes that character," reveals Giffen of his 1980s DC Comics jabmeister, Ambush Bug. "They fought us every step of the way."
AMBUSH BUG NOTHING SPECIAL
HOMELESS HUNGRY HAVE THE HICCUPS PLEASE HELP!
Art: Keith Giffen & Gordon
"Boy did that nose dive fast," jokes Giffen of *The Heckler*, a hero who ridicules villains to death. "There was no sales decline—it leapt off the sales cliff of doom."
the Heckler
IN ONE END...
...OUT THE OTHER!
Can The Heckler resist the urge to press the tantalizing button!? The red, shiny, candy-like button! It calls out to him. Heckler... Heckler... press me...
DO NOT PUSH
Hmmm.
The Heckler: Trademark DC Comics Inc.

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT KEITH GIFFEN: WHO DO YOU THINK PROVIDES HIM WITH THE PAPER HE DRAWS ON?
ME.
The only reason that Giffen made the *Ambush Bug Nothing Special* was that legendary editor Julius Schwartz asked him to.
SO...I'M GONNA TEACH GEEKS HOW TA FRAG, HUH? HOW COULD BE FUN!
CREEP COULDA SAVED HIMSELF A LOTTA PAIN BY SAYIN' SO IN THE FIRST PLACE
THEN AGAIN, I'D PROBABLY HAVE HURT HIM ANYWAYS!
Class is in session, and Lobo is the teacher of Pain 101. Created by Giffen and originally named Lunatic, Lobo is by far the most brutal of mainstream comic characters.
All Ambush Bug Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1995 DC Comics Inc.

sibility over him," Giffen says, "and Bisley took everything Alan and I had done and rubbed our faces in it."

DC wanted more after the successful *Lobo* mini-series in 1990, and Giffen decided to push his luck. "I came up with the *Lobo Paramilitary Christmas Special* as a joke," he says, "so DC could hand it back to me and say, 'Are you *crazy*?' And they published it. I thought, 'Wow. I'm gonna keep going further and further until they make me stop.' "

That didn't take very long. "About the third issue of *Lobo's Back*, [editor-in-chief] Dick Giordano pulled me aside and said, 'I know what you're doing...and stop it.' " Giffen had been merrily setting Lobo up for a grudge match against "Combat Christ and the Howlin' Apostles." When DC put its foot down, Jesus and Co. became Nick Torquemada and the Howlin' Inquisitors.

DC stomped a little harder on Ambush Bug, a riotous 1980s goofball who waggled his antennae at the DC Universe. "DC loathes that character," Giffen says. "They fought us every step of the way. We had to get permission from DC editors to parody their characters."

After hassles on the *Ambush Bug* and *Son of Ambush Bug* mini-series, Giffen and fellow Bugmeister Robert Loren Fleming swore never to do the character again. They reneged in 1992 for the *Ambush Bug Nothing Special*, simply because Julius Schwartz asked them to do it. "I can't say no to Julie," says Giffen, citing the legendary editor's contributions to the comics scene.

Ambush Bug may have inspired mixed responses, but Giffen's next parody superguy got a nearly unanimous vote. Everybody, it seems, hated *The Heckler*, a giggle of a book about a hero who ridiculed villains to death. This was the "agony of defeat" guy in comics form, and Giffen describes his beloved book's failure with the glee most people reserve for their successes.

"Boy, did that poor bastard nosedive fast," he says. "There was no sales decline—it leapt off the sales cliff of doom. They say if you throw two objects off the Empire State Building, they'll hit the ground at the same time—not if one is an issue of *The Heckler*! It was the *Hindenburg* of comics. When I saw the book had redlined, I begged DC to kill it. I think they wanted to go one more issue, but my heart wasn't in it."

Giffen hasn't confined his experiments to weird little comics like *Ambush Bug* and *The Heckler*. He built his name doing group books—*The Defenders* at Marvel, *Omega Men*, *Justice League In-*

ternational and *Legion of Super-Heroes* at DC—that defied the norm. Of all his "straight" superhero work, he's proudest of the *Legion of Super-Heroes* series he started in 1989 with writers Tom and Mary Bierbaum.

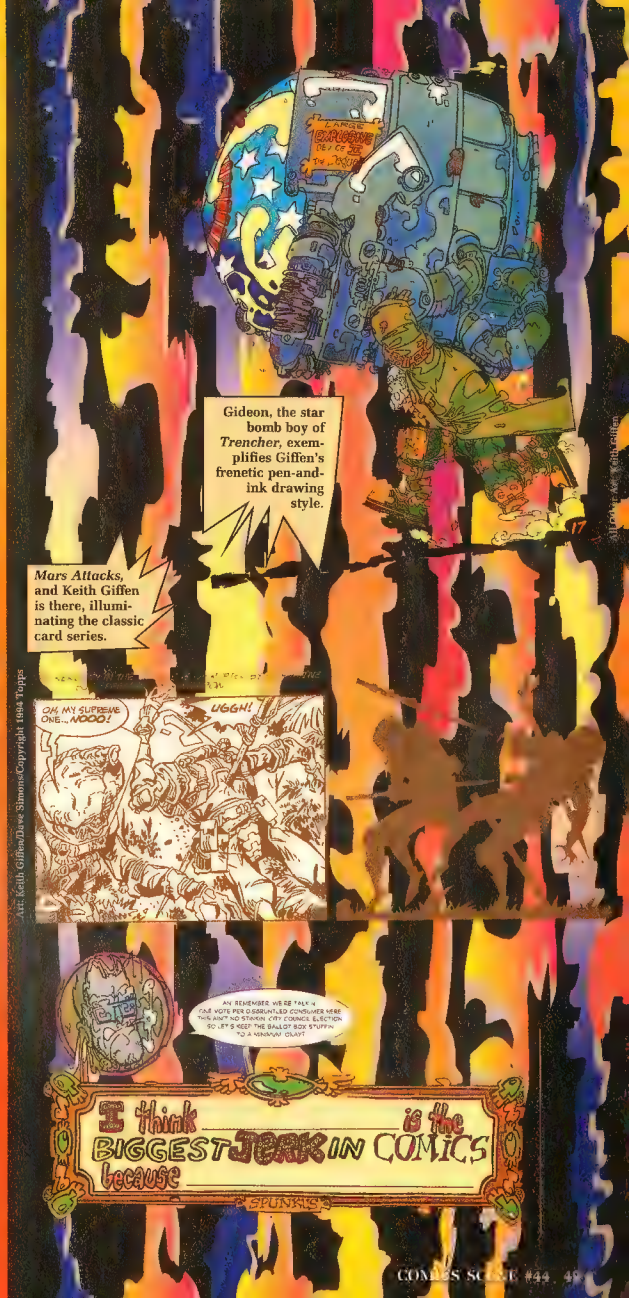
Ambitious and moody, *Legion* rankled the superteam's groupies. To be fair, the thing that angered the most fans wasn't the book's creators' fault. When a DC order from on high forbid the *Legion* team from using Superboy (the Legion's original catalyst), Giffen and the Bierbaums found themselves wiping out—*à la Crisis on Infinite Earths*—the entire "reality" the Legionnaires occupied. In *Legion of Super-Heroes* #4, it just went poof.

Were readers upset? Oh, a tad. "Invalidating the work of so many fine artists and writers just to feed Keith's ego is a criminal waste and display of complete disregard and disdain for your readers," wrote one grouser. Ironically, Giffen threw a fit himself at what he calls "the infamous Superboy edict," and credits Tom and Mary Bierbaum with plotting *Legion* #5, which partially salvaged *Legion* from oblivion.

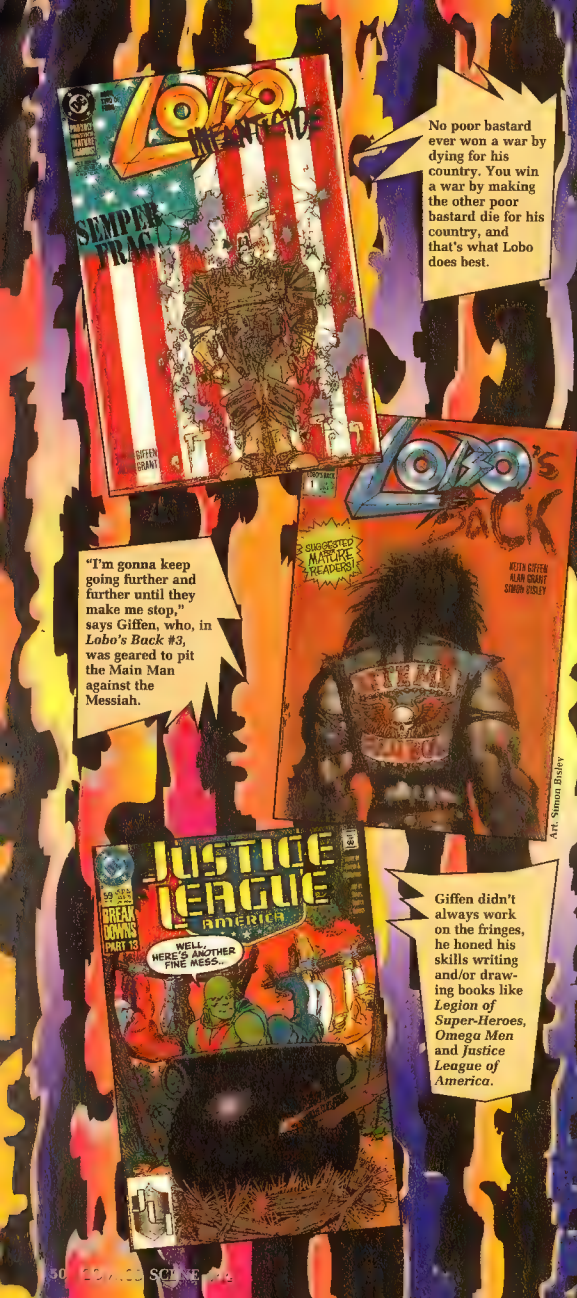
The art in *Legion* made waves too. Giffen restricted the pages to a nine-panel grid, and instilled a sense of motion by "juggling the camera," as he puts it, using offbeat and wildly shifting compositions that seemed to confuse readers. "The more they hated it, the more I *had* to do it," Giffen says. "If they had just shut up about it, it might have blown over sooner."

Giffen first displayed the expressionistic drawing style he used for *Legion* in the mid-1980s. It drew strongly on the work of European comics artist Jose Munoz—too strongly, at first. After a friend gave Giffen a stack of photocopied Munoz pages, he says, "for a two-week period I did nothing but drool over the guy's stuff like a mental patient."

Comics Journal writer Mark Burbey quickly pointed out that Giffen had not only absorbed Munoz's style, he had "swiped" sections of the artwork in *Ambush Bug* and other comics from Munoz's *Alack Sinner*. Giffen says the accusations jolted him. "Did I deliberately take this man's artwork and try to pass it off as my own to further my career? No, I never traced or directly copied his work," he maintains. "Doing [this style] almost killed my career. Nobody liked the approach. Did I cross a line that shouldn't be crossed—so that either through osmosis or studying his work it gets parroted on the page like a Xerox machine? Yeah, I did. None of the motives the *Journal* ascribed to me were applicable at all. But what happened was reprehensible. That's not the way to honor somebody whose work you really respect."


Gideon, the star bomb boy of *Trencher*, exemplifies Giffen's frenetic pen-and-ink drawing style.
Mars Attacks, and Keith Giffen is there, illuminating the classic card series.
OH, MY SUPREME ONE... NOOO!
UGGH!
I think is the BIGGEST JERK IN COMICS because
SPUNKY'S

Art: Keith Giffen/Dave Simons Copyright 1984 Topps


LOBO
SEMPER FRAG
No poor bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. You win a war by making the other poor bastard die for his country, and that's what Lobo does best.
LOBO'S BACK
SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS!
Art: Simon Bisley
"I'm gonna keep going further and further until they make me stop," says Giffen, who, in *Lobo's Back #3*, was geared to pit the Main Man against the Messiah.
JUSTICE LEAGUE AMERICA
BREAK DOWNS PART 13
WELL, HERE'S ANOTHER FINE MESS...
Giffen didn't always work on the fringes, he honed his skills writing and/or drawing books like *Legion of Super-Heroes*, *Omega Men* and *Justice League of America*.

Rather than bolt from the style, though, Giffen stuck with it, making it his own. It lent a noirish feel to such books as *Video Jack*, *Legion* and *Dr. Fate*, and established Giffen as one of mainstream comics' most avant-garde artists. But in 1993, Giffen changed styles again, as radically as before. Gone were the brooding black shadows and thick outlines; in their place Giffen put a bewildering tangle of spidery lines.

The artist says this scribbly style is the result of his working directly in ink on the page, skipping the pencil stage altogether. "I never sharpen my pencil, so it has a blunt edge," he says of the difference between his pencil and ink styles. "When I use it, I can't get in and do those little niggly-noogly lines."

In his new rococo-style artwork, Giffen eliminates the black areas of the drawing, which tend to define shapes and give the page depth. That means it's up to colorist Lovern Kindzierski of Digital Chameleon to help your eyes figure out what the hell's going on. Kindzierski and his assistants scan Giffen's pages into a computer and assign colors there: Digital Chameleon also does *Trencher*'s lettering via computer.

Kindzierski works primarily with softer, mid-range color tones, rather than the pure, bold colors that characterize comics, and uses the bolder tones to pull something off the page or push it back. "I also try to keep colors specific to certain planes," he adds. "If I use yellow in the far background, I won't also use it in the drawing's foreground." Kindzierski notes that he has been asking Giffen to do heavier outlines, but says he doesn't have much trouble "decoding" Giffen's linework. "Sometimes I have to figure it out—'Oh, that's coming down here so it can't be his hand...' but most of it I get right away," he says. Giffen trusts Kindzierski's work so much that he doesn't check the colored pages before they go to press. "He sees what I've done when you do," says Kindzierski.

Trencher is Giffen's first real stab at the whole enchilada: drawing, plotting and writing. He's still finding his voice with the latter, he admits. "I often find myself at war with my native tongue. The *Trencher* stuff is such goofy nonsense, very stream-of-consciousness, that it's a lot of fun to do. He doesn't speak good English, and neither do I. On other projects, dialogue is the toughest part."

Plotting, however, is a Giffen strong point. Recently, he has been plotting Erik Larsen's *Freak Force* and Extreme's *Bloodstrike*, although there he says things went radically wrong. "I had no feel for the book," he says. "I should have tendered my resignation long before I did."

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Image may not have room for *Trencher*, but they still roll out the carpet for Giffen. He and fellow *Ambush Bug* conspirator Fleming are taking over *Supreme* for a dozen issues, starting with #13. "I've seen massive potential in *Supreme*, even beyond the 'Superman with an attitude' idea," Giffen says. What do the *Bug* boys have planned? "We're going to put him through the wringer," is all Giffen will say.

Giffen has committed to pencilling a *Supreme* annual written by Tom and Mary Bierbaum; he'll also pencil a 16-page Vanguard story this year. He's also talking to editor Joey Cavalieri about making inroads into Marvel's 2099 universe, "and seeing what damage I can do there."

For Topps, Giffen is writing a five-issue *Mars Attacks* mini-series (STARLOG #203) based on the classic cards, and pencilling backup stories written by Len Brown, one of the cards' original creators. Rounding out Giffen's hectic schedule is Topps' *Victory*. Approached to pencil *Victory*, Giffen was hesitant until he found out the writer was Kurt Busiek from *Marvels*. "I stand in awe of that book," the artist exclaims.

Victory, set for a June release, will reintroduce all the Jack Kirby characters Topps has published in books like *Satan's Six* and *Secret City Saga*, but with a more contemporary bent. What's more, Captain Victory, a Kirby character who starred in his own Pacific Comics series more than a decade ago, is joining the huddle, as is a new character based on Kirby designs, Tiger 21.

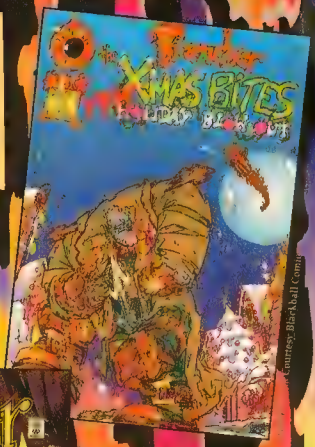
"In a nutshell, the Insectons Captain Victory once fought have infested Earth," says Topps Comics Editor Jim Salicrup. "Being a military man, Captain Victory decides the best way to take care of this problem is to destroy the whole planet. The Earth heroes are a little put out by this." Planned fall spinoffs from the five-issue *Victory* series include a book for Bombast, Nightglider and Captain Glory, pencilled by Giffen.

For his Kirbyverse artwork, Salicrup says, Giffen is using a "more traditional, Kirby-inspired superhero approach." That's like coming full circle for Giffen, whose early Marvel work bore the late master's stamp. But you can bet *Victory* won't resemble Giffen's 1970s issues of *The Defenders*. Looking back just ain't his style.

"I don't think I'll ever stop reinventing myself," Keith Giffen says. "When you hear I'm pencilling a book for Topps, you think, 'What's *this* gonna look like?' I like that. I still can't be buttonholed."

That's *pigeonholed*, Keith. But as Lobo would say, "Who gives a @#!?"

Giffen says that his scribbly style is a result of working directly in ink on the page. "When I use [a pencil], I can't get in and do those niggly-noogly lines."



Courtesy Blackball Comics

Hooo-ray for Hecklerwood! If you're a hero, you're now a zero, 'cause The Heckler'll kill ya with laughs.

"They say if you throw two objects off the Empire State Building, they'll hit the ground at the same time—not if one is an issue of *The Heckler*!" muses Giffen.

Fifty years ago, Jeanne Bates strode into action beside "The Ghost Who Walks."

THE PHA

PHANTOM'S Lady

By TOM WEAVER

Her acting career began not with a bang but with a scream—something she has been doing regularly ever since. That's not to say that that's *all* Jeanne Bates is known for: In addition to her radio and screen shrieks, in movies ranging from Bela Lugosi's *The Return of the Vampire* to the recent cannibal horror/comedy *Mom*, she has played in dramas, Westerns and comedies, sung on stage, and essayed a regular role on TV's *Ben Casey*. Serial and comic strip fans may first recognize her name from the credits of Columbia's jungle adventure *The Phantom* (1943).

Born in Berkeley, California, Bates began her acting career while a student at San Mateo Junior College, appearing on radio soap operas in San Francisco. She had the lead in an airwave mystery series, Lew X. Lansworth's *Whodunit* (Bates' scream was the show's "signature"), which became so successful that it (and Bates) moved down to Hollywood in 1941. Two years later, Bates and Lansworth wed.

By the time they married, Bates was already under contract to Columbia Pictures, although she had no delusions that the studio intended to build her into one of their big stars. "I was just one more Columbia starlet," says Bates, now in her sixth decade of movies. "Max Arno was the head casting man and he took me in to meet Mr. [Harry] Cohn, head of Columbia. Cohn looked up at me for a couple seconds, and then went *right back* to what he was doing," she laughs. "But even though I knew they had no 'big plans' for me, I did do about 22 films in the short time I was there. There was a very nice man in charge of Columbia's B unit and he liked me a lot, and he put me into some films."

Bates' debut was in a Boston Blackie mystery with Chester Morris, followed by a Charles Starrett Western on which she learned one of her earliest moviemaking lessons. "I love horses, but I never could afford to take riding lessons or anything. So, the day I had to ride the horse, I practiced and practiced. But, after practicing with the horse all morning long, when they said *action*, the horse went one way when we were supposed to go the *other*! I had no control over the horse whatsoever! So early on, I learned *not* to say that I could do things I couldn't, because it's too dangerous!" Other early roles included a pre-credits bit as a girl stalked by a vampire (Lugosi's stand-in) in 1943's *The Return of the Vampire* (screaming that scream again), comedy two-reelers, an Office of War Information short and other bottom-of-the-bill features.

One of her first co-starring roles was in Columbia's *The Phantom* (1943), based on the King Features syndicate comic strip. It took four writers to adapt Lee Falk's popular strip into the 15-episode adventure, which featured cowboy actor Tom Tyler as Godfrey Prescott and his masked alter-ego, the Phantom. The premise sounded glamorously exotic while production, needless to say, was anything but. "We shot that at a studio called Darmour on Santa Monica [Boulevard], a really old, *old* studio. It must have been there in silent times! I think they had only *one* stage and the dressing rooms, and it was all 'out in the open'—if it rained, forget it, folks, you would be drowned between leaving the dressing room and getting to the soundstage!" she laughs.

Exteriors were shot "across from the Valley, in the hills up there, where Charles Manson killed all those people. Then, there was another scene we shot at Malibu Lake. They had all these extras as natives getting into a canoe and I thought to myself, 'They're not all gonna get in there, it'll sink!' And sure enough, it went down with all these guys trying to get into it! And, of course, the camera kept rolling as the boat and all these extras went down. It was *very* funny!"

In the serial, directed by veteran soundstage speedster B. Reeves Eason, Professor Davidson (Frank Shannon) and his daughter Diana (Bates) arrive in Africa searching for the Lost City of Zoloz and its hidden treasure. Other self-interested parties with designs on the city and its riches include a local crook (Joe Devlin) as well as an international baddie (Kenneth MacDonald) who intends to build a secret air base there. Bates' fiance (Tom Tyler) takes on the second identity of the Phantom and, together with his dog Devil (played by Ace, the Wonder Dog), battles the villains throughout 15 chapters before restoring peace to the jungles.

"Tom Tyler was very nice," Bates says of the Phantom himself. "Later on in life, he got some disease—elephantiasis or some other terrible thing! He was a nice man, very quiet and he did his job. And I was very impressed with the man who played my father [Frank

Selected Photos: Courtesy Jeanne Bates

Still active today in movies, TV and stage, Jeanne Bates believes that an actor needs to keep working, "to keep your 'tools' sharp."

Shannon, *Flash Gordon*'s Dr. Zarkov]. There was one scene where they were opening a treasure chest, and his hand got caught on a hinge and it cut the [webbing] of his hand, between the thumb and the forefinger. And, he didn't stop. I would have screamed and yelled and hollered, but this actor, bleeding to death, went through the scene without a murmur. Only *after* the shot was completed did he say, 'Well, I've been cut.' I thought that was wonderful, because he *was* an older man.

"There was another incident where the heavies grabbed us and they were taking us up a ladder. Supposedly the Phantom was down below, being eaten by a gorilla—or *what*ever! The heavies went up this ladder, and it was nailed into the mountain wall. When I started going up—I remember that my boots were too big and my pants were too tight [for climbing]—the ladder started coming away from the wall. One of the actors at the top saw it happening and he grabbed it, so I finally got up. (They don't stop, you know, they keep shooting!) Then, we were supposed to go over to the edge and look down to see the Phantom being eaten by the monster. Well, at the shot's end, I couldn't *move*. I was frozen. My husband had been a reporter when the Bay Bridge was being built and he said that people would *freeze*—that's how they would fall off the bridge and drown. Well, from that day on, I can't get up on a height without freezing, and I think it was all from *that*—it was a traumatic experience."

Bates recalls working "three or four weeks" on the 15-chapter (30 reel) *Phantom* serial, including a period of a couple of days "when production was closed down because somebody caught cold. Because it was *freezing*! It was *very* cold—they were shooting this in the winter, and we were in pith helmets and short sleeves. Every time we spoke, you could see our breath! On one of the first days of shooting, we were way up in the mountains, and they went downtown to Los Angeles to get 'natives'—extras. They bus-loaded these guys up there, I guess they were Chicanos, and then they stripped 'em. They were stripping 'em down to loincloths and painting their bodies to look like natives, and these guys were shivering to death! There was an Indian man in the picture, and he said that how you keep from catching cold is to keep standing, *do not sit down*. So I've always remembered that—I don't know whether it *works* or not, but it seemed to work *then*!"

Eason, who was better at directing action than actors (his second-unit credits include the chariot race in the silent *Ben-Hur*, the burning of Atlanta in *Gone With the Wind* and the charge in Errol Flynn's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*), "was an oldtime director, from *way* back. He had a nickname, 'Breezy.' I don't remember him *too* well, but he was one of those rugged guys, like John Ford. He *never* stopped the camera!"

Bates, who never read the *Phantom* strip, also didn't see her serial when it was originally released "because they showed at Saturday matinees, for the little kids. But I now have *The Phantom* on tape, all 15 episodes, given to me on two tapes by a man in Burbank. I've seen one tape, and [*laughs*] I haven't gone on to the other one yet!"

Bates, George Macready and Erik Rolf were the well-groomed leads of Columbia's *The Soul of a Monster*.

Design & Layout: Vera Naughton
Soul Photo: Copyright 1944 Columbia Pictures

Elevated to B stardom, Bates played one of the leads in Columbia's 1944 horror movie *The Soul of a Monster*, about a dying surgeon (George Macready) whose foolhardy wife (Bates) prays that the Devil save his life. A satanic emissary (Rose Hobart) appears and saves Macready, who's now a different man, cruel and mysterious. Bates has fond memories of her *Soul* co-stars, particularly "Rose Hobart, the poor thing! There was a scene where I was supposed to slap her. Well, I would grit my teeth and try and try and try, I would get up to that point in the scene and I just couldn't do it. Instead of a slap, it would just be a pat—and a pat was no good for the scene. I guess the pats were just driving her up the wall, because finally she said, 'Will you please—will you *p-l-e-a-s-e*—just *slap* me?!' And to tell the truth, I don't remember now if I was ever able to really hit her or not, but I *know* she pleaded with me to do it, just to get it over with!"

It was after her stint at Columbia that Bates had one of her best '40s film roles, as the long-suffering wife of mad illusionist Erich von Stroheim in PRC's horror melodrama *The Mask of Diljon* (1946), directed by Lew Landers. "He was wonderful, von Stroheim," says Bates. "My husband had told me about him—I was fairly young and I didn't know too much about von Stroheim, so my husband filled me in. I guess von Stroheim did the picture just because he wanted the bucks. And he got his girl friend [Denise Vernac] in the picture, too, so *she* got paid! What impressed me was the fact that he would listen to what I had to say [in the scenes]. Most actors would ask you a question and you would be answering them, and their eyes would drift off to see who was coming in or who was going out. I was very impressed with the fact that he would listen to *anything* I had to say!"

In the '50s, Bates toiled on TV as well as in features, including a role which has completely faded from memory, as Peter Coe's wife in the jungle adventure *Sabaka* (1953) with Boris Karloff. She also worked regularly as a nurse—in the movies, that is—first in the supernatural *Back from the Dead* (1957), midwifing ghost-possessed mom-to-be Peggie Castle, and again in *The Strangler* (1964), where mad mama's-boy Victor Buono murders Bates for saving his ailing mom's (Ellen Corby) life. ("It was spooky lying on that gurney, being hauled out like I was dead! I remember thinking, 'My God, how horrible, that this could happen to a person!'") She wore white on TV as well, playing the compassionate Miss Wills on the hospital drama *Ben Casey* (1961-66).

Other TV roles included Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* (in the classic "It's a *Good* Life") and two visits to *One Step Beyond*, hosted by director/producer John Newland. "I knew Newland from radio," says Bates, who appeared twice on *Beyond*, the first time as Mrs. Abraham Lincoln in "The Day the World Wept." "I thought that was quite good, I liked doing that one. I remember that the makeup on the actor who played Lincoln, Barry Atwater, took *hours*. I did some research, of course, on Mary Todd Lincoln, but they wanted her to come across as a dreary lady so I got that black wig—and, come on, folks, that ain't gonna make you look glamorous!" In the '60s she also went back to her first love, the

Vampiric victim Bates isn't long for this world, despite her doctors' care in *The Return of the Vampire*.

Sinking canoes, rickety ladders and freezing location work were just a few of the *Phantom* perils faced by Bates, Tom Tyler and Frank Shannon.

Serial star Bates stands ready for action with Tyler and "Wonder Dog" Ace in Columbia's *The Phantom* serial.

Vampire Photo: SI Hilaire/Copyright 1943 Columbia Pictures
Phantom Photos: Courtesy Dan Scapperotti/Tom Weaver

The actress (seen here in a Columbia "glamorous pose") never kidded herself that the studio had star-making roles in store for her.

Bates owns the four-hour *Phantom* serial on video, but hasn't gotten around to watching all of it yet.

All Phantom Photos: Copyright 1943 Columbia Pictures
Phantom Characters: Copyright 1994 King Features

stage, in the Los Angeles area and on the road.

Film work in the '70s included the satirical *Suppose They Gave a War and Nobody Came?* (1970) and one of her most unusual feature credits, David Lynch's experimental *Eraserhead* (1978). "That was quite an experience. One of the ladies in it, Judith Anna Roberts, who plays the girl in the room across the hall [from star Jack Nance]—she belonged to Theater West, a theater group that *I* belonged to, and she recommended me for *Eraserhead*. I then went on an interview with David, then an art student, and he said, 'Oh, no, you're much too pretty.' And *I* said, 'No, no, you don't understand. I can be pretty and I can be *awful*.' So, I sold myself on how awful I could look. And it worked! Also, the man who played my husband, Allen Joseph, was from Theater West, so Judith got us a *couple* of jobs.

"We worked at the Doheny mansion that the American Film Institute used to rent for a dollar a year. We shot in the mansion's stables—upstairs in the stables, they had living quarters for the grooms. It was great working for David. I only worked a week or so, and he insisted on paying us. Then, I saw him a couple of *years* later, in a bank, and I asked him how it was going, and he hadn't finished it yet, because he ran out of money! Finally, he got somebody to finance it and he finished it."

The nightmarish student film (Lynch's feature debut) reportedly took a year to shoot and another year to edit; Bates and her husband caught an early "cut" of the cult-movie-to-be. "My husband Lew, who was a writer, and I went to see it, the first showing, and Lew said to David, 'Don't you think it's a little *long*?' And it was like *stabbing* David in the *heart*! Since then, they've cut it—that first [cut] was *forever*! But *Eraserhead* was what got him his start—it's still showing today, and, needless to say, *Eraserhead* got him *The Elephant Man* [1980]."

Eraserhead also led to more film work for Bates, including the title role in the cannibal horror movie *Mom*. In the direct-to-home-video feature, Bates is the unsuspecting landlady of an unearthly "flesh eater" (*Blade Runner*'s Brion James) who bites her, turning *her* into a fellow carnivore (with fangs and yellow contact lenses). "Both the casting director and Pat Rand, who directed *Mom*, were ardently in love with *Eraserhead*, so that was part of the reason I got it. And, also, because I could *scream* good!" Bates laughs.

Despite the makeup's discomfort, Bates enjoyed making *Mom* ("It was one of the first really good parts I'd had in a long, long time, and I liked doing it *very* much!"), not to mention the fact that it led to another horror role, as the senior sorceress of a coven of modern-day witches in director Brian Yuzna's *Initiation: Silent Night, Deadly Night 4* (1991). "Oh, *that* disaster!" the actress scoffs. "I felt so sorry for that young actress [Neith Hunter] with all of those bugs crawling all over her—*ai yi yi*! That was a cheapie."

Other roles in newer films have included director Lawrence Kasdan's *Grand Canyon* (1991) as well as *Die Hard 2* (1990), as Bonnie Bedelia's sassy fellow airline passenger, and *Dream Lover*. Bates also still works on TV (*The Commish*), in commercials and on stage (most recently in Jean Giradoux's *Ondine* in LA), so apparently retirement is not yet on the horizon. "But, you know, you're *semi*-retired whether you want to be or not, when you get to be a mature lady!"

According to Bates (widowed since 1981), the important thing is simply to keep working, which is why, after a half-century in the business, she still belongs to acting workshops and does the occasional "freebie" play on the side. "A painter can go and paint, and a musician can practice by himself, and a composer can work at home, but an *actor* has to have an audience, to keep your 'tools' sharp. I'm not ready yet to 'say die'!"

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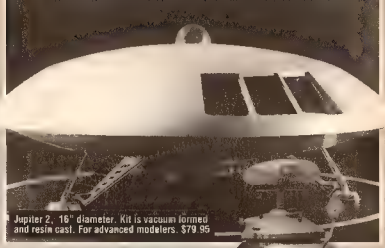

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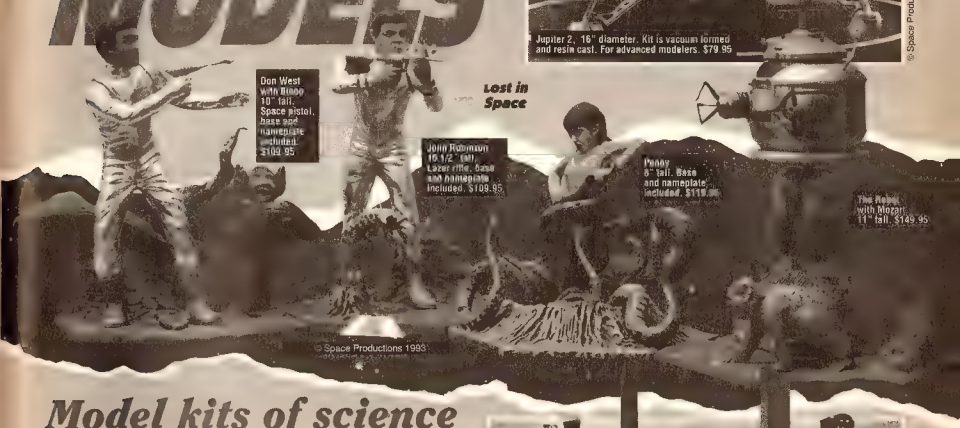
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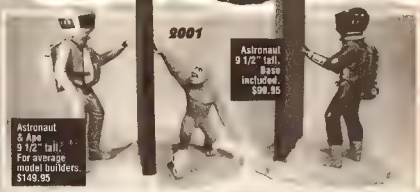
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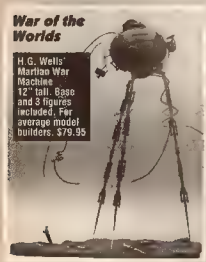

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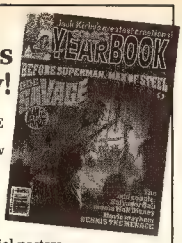

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Koepp

(continued from page 44)

then, and I think it can be accepted now. The hardest thing was to decide *not* to be scared off by the similarities. They *are* similar stories, and that's that. I don't want to go out and make a bunch of changes that may be OK in 1993 but won't hold up 10 years from now. Or will look silly and piss off many people, because it was done for the wrong reason. And keeping in its time frame—the '30s—was an important step toward that. You know, the Batman movies are present-day.

CS: Sort of.

KOEPP: Yeah, they put it in a sort of Neverland.

CS: It's claimed that this film is set so late in the 1930s it's almost the 1940s. Another person connected with the film says it's 1936. Which is it?

KOEPP: It starts in '26 and the action's in '33. It will piss off the toy companies that I said that, but I don't *care*. Even though it's a period film, we're seeing *The Shadow* through a '90s prism, so I thought we could do whatever we want.

CS: Do you think in doing a period piece the audience needs a modern-day prism in order to relate to the characters?

KOEPP: I think whether they need it or not, it's unavoidable because you, the writer, exist when you exist. Your mind is a great big filter and it's just going to be there, no matter how hard you try. Look how Westerns from the '40s and '50s are different from Westerns today. In this case, *The Shadow* is supposed to be fun, and some of the fun we have is by being aware of our own time period. Not with anachronisms, but a sensibility.

CS: The Shadow is an icon. Do you fear a backlash by fans who might disagree with your take that Lamont Cranston is intrinsically evil rather than someone who projects an evil persona for the psychological advantage it gives over his enemies?

KOEPP: It's something that, believe me, I gave a lot of thought to. When *The Shadow* moved from one medium to another, they always changed the rules and fleshed out a little more of the story. I thought this would be our chance to give some background, which was really withheld in the pulp novels, and make up where he came from and how he became The Shadow. I know there are a great many people who love this story and this guy, and may not wish that to be his background. But I hope they'll see it as we did—that it presents a more rounded character. Rather than being a peripheral character, and really brings The Shadow to the center of the drama. CS

Crow

(continued from page 12)

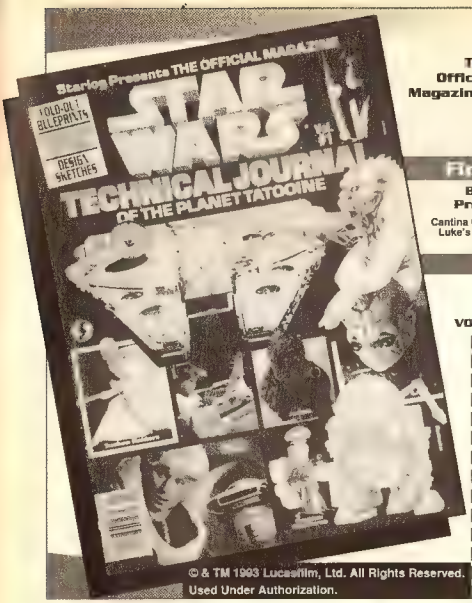
comic by making Eric a musician, which he did in order to enable the film to use music to help define his character. In the comic, Eric had no specific profession (although O'Barr imagined him as a construction worker). But, the producer wanted him to have a defined role in society to better express the movie's main theme.

"We went with a look which is evocative of the comics," he points out, "a very industrial look, and we've included in the film a good deal of industrial music. We have other forms of music—alternative, for example—but there was a decision to combine that visual look with an aural feel that would together create an entire world.

"The other thing we added, which we felt would make an important integration of the use of flashbacks in the comics and the film, is the ability to touch people to get their memories. Because, that way, when the Crow comes back from the grave, he can piece together, along with the audience, exactly what happened to him. Not only can he touch people and get their memories, he also has the ability to touch objects and get a specific memory off that object, as well as to give memories, which is very effectively used. We enhanced that because simply going to flashbacks is not as intriguing as being able to involve those flashbacks in a dramatic sense. Everything else is a faithful rendition."

Most kept in touch with O'Barr during the entire creative process, informing him of new decisions every step of the way. "So often Hollywood simply turns its back on the literary influence and forgets the writer of the original material," Most affirms. "I felt that James' portrait of this world, his creation of the comics in such a filmic sense, really demonstrated an understanding of film. Every draft of the script went to James right away, and his input was extensive in the details that evolved out of his comics that we either didn't notice or pay particular attention to.

"We brought our production designer together with James in Detroit," he goes on, "had James take him to every place that was an influence for the locales in the comics and show him the entire world, from which our extremely skilled and talented production designer, Alex McDowell, made faithful renditions for sets and exteriors. In fact, the day James walked on the set, he said, 'I can't believe it. This is the street I lived on. This is the street of the comics.' He was in absolute shock at how perfectly the film had become his vision." CS



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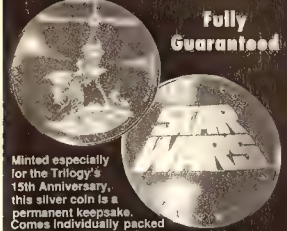

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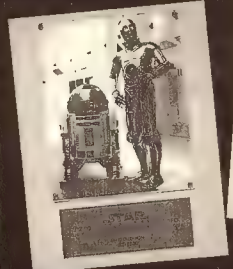

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Coffee

(continued from page 19)

the Cartoonist (that's what he's called) appeared in that strip.

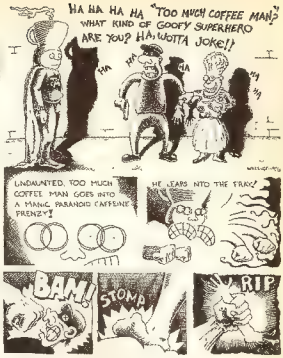
"I divided the book into three parts for a couple of reasons. One was so that I would be able to do it, just in that it's easier to do eight-page stories. The other thing would be to expand horizontally, so that I wouldn't be stuck doing *Too Much Coffee Man* for the rest of my life. I wanted some horizontal leeway, so that I could do relationship stuff or move into doing serious things as well as humorous things, incorporate the different facets of my personality, to have enough variety in this comic book to keep *me* interested in doing it. I wouldn't want to draw a fat guy in longjohns forever. I just imagine myself at age 50 going, 'I hate this.' All bitter and vindictive.

"Interpersonal things—the way people relate to each other—really interests me, and I do that through the other characters.

"*Too Much Coffee Man*, I guess, represents my subconscious, or my unconscious. It's a great deal of free association and free-thinking, bad puns, slapstick humor, nickel philosophy. Like the cliché story, where I had Too Much Coffee Man fight Cliché. They fought by shouting clichés at each other. That was just goofy.

"And then the guy that's reading it is talking about his relationship, he and his girl friend. Joel and his platonic girl friend Trixie see a movie and talk about the clichés of moviemaking, and the clichés of getting drunk. But that's more realistic—how people lie to each other, how people are close and alienated. He says to his friend, 'Does everybody feel as lonely and alienated as I do?' And Trixie says, 'No.'

"The Cartoonist part is about the struggle to produce artwork. I really wanted to get into what it's like to produce something, and then the reactions that are given to what you produce. It's a really unique situation to produce this little comic book, and then you get a plethora of responses. There's *no* making sense of it. And dealing with the absurdity of actually having an audience for the whole thing—I want to address that."


HA HA HA HA "TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN?" WHAT KIND OF GOOFY SUPERHERO ARE YOU? HA! WOTTA JOKE!!
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BAM!
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Life is tough when you have a coffee mug for a head. The endless prodding, the teasing, the hideous jabs at your ego. It could all just make a superhero...*snap*.

Wheeler says, "The plotlines in my book are basically going to be...at first Joel is really into Too Much Coffee Man, as, like, an underground thing. As the Cartoonist gains popularity, he'll go through a number of changes as his book moves from an underground thing into an overground, mainstream thing. At some point, Joel will say, 'Oh yeah, it used to be really good back when it was a mini-comic, but now that it's a cartoon on TV, it really sucks. They've totally diluted the original idea.' I'll be trying to talk about artwork from different perspectives."

Plans for *Too Much Coffee Man* #3, due on the stands in August, call for that to be his "All-Origin Issue."

"The origin of Too Much Coffee Man, which I've figured out my own little twist on, will be a bit more of a superhero parody than other things I've done. The origin issue will have a couple good twists. It will be an interview with the Cartoonist, talking about how he came up with Too Much Coffee Man. That's where I'll answer the 'how did you think of that?' question. It's the terrible truth that opportunism, or whatever, is the way I thought of it. I haven't figured out what I'm going to do with the relationship portion. I might just have them talk about first love or beginnings. Or I might do an ending, and have the ending of the relationship be symbolic of a beginning. There are a few different directions I could go with it. It's just a matter of writing a whole lot and then cutting down to fit into eight pages."

And where does Shannon Wheeler hope *Too Much Coffee Man* will take him? "I'm very envious of Dave Sim's situation on *Cerebus*, where he's managing to put out a book regularly and able to make a decent living. I just want to put out my comic book and be financially stable. And then have my friends put out their comics. I like the notion of umbrella publishing, where we're all doing what we *want* to do."

Ah, but that's a notion to ponder over tomorrow's cup of coffee.

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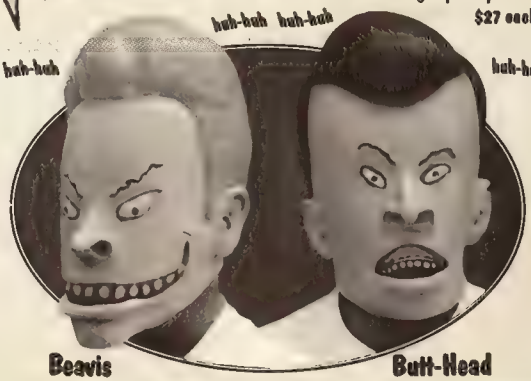

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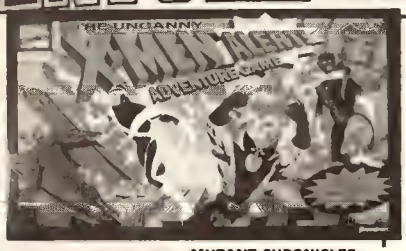

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Edge

(continued from page 23)

knows the genteel "laughing cavalier" hero is *passé*, but he still works to reconcile his more idealistic notions with the barbarism of today's comics and films.

"Take a fight in the movies," the artist says. "It's not enough nowadays to knock the guy down, you've got to give him a couple of kicks to the head, a couple to the stomach, stomp him once or twice. And even that doesn't do it. One of the most frequent clichés today is to see a guy get his head blasted off after a tremendous fight, everyone says, 'Ah, he's finally dead,' and two seconds later, he's sitting up, ready for another go-around.

"Comics reflect a preoccupation with power—grace is no longer a concern. Today, the heroes bristle with weaponry, and they're so muscular that they themselves are lethal weapons. Somehow or other, heroes have to be made likable and palatable, not *just* destructive. These guys are too inhospitable to last forever—who could live with them?"

Characterization and plotting are two ways to take comics beyond the limitations of pure, dumb force. "We hope to give the characters in *Edge* some possibility for development," Kane says. "You need space for that, sections where the story actually proceeds. You can't do *any* kind of narrative when you just draw full-page figures, or six characters jumping off a rooftop for two and a half pages."

Certainly *Edge* should spark readers to ask whether superpowers would be a gift or a curse. Oddly enough, though, neither Kane nor Grant has thought much about whether *they* would want Ultimate-style abilities. "It's something I write, not something I dream about," says Steven Grant.

"The one time this came up was ages ago at the Marvel offices. John Byrne and somebody were getting into an argument about what superhero they would be if they could. Byrne's response was that he would be Iron Man. Iron Man is a guy, who dresses up in all this armor and gears up with all sorts of weapons. He's not out fighting the villains with his bare hands—he stacks the deck.

"I said I would be Hawkeye. Everyone was going, '*Hawkeye*?! Why?' I said, because then I wouldn't have to get within 100 yards of anybody I'm fighting!"

Would Gil Kane want superpowers if they were on offer? "I would take 'em immediately," he answers wryly, "to protect myself against the coming annihilation. I would probably end up being the only person left in the world." CS

Eudaemon

(continued from page 27)

the buyers a glimpse of upcoming characters."

Nelson's first work in comics was painting covers for *Ghost Rider* and *RoboCop*, and he says that painting is still a source of pleasure and professional challenge for him.

"I don't know why I enjoy it, but I do," he observes. "The subject matter makes a big difference. If I were an illustrator painting tubes of toothpaste, I probably *wouldn't* enjoy it much—but painting large purple demons is fun! Plus, you never know what you're going to get; you can stand back and say this one was great and this one was lousy, but how did that happen? It isn't easy, even though some people make it look that way. Black and white [line art] has a right-or-wrong look to it that painting doesn't.

"When you never know what you're going to get, you never lose that spontaneity that keeps your work fresh. You enjoy your work and get a kick out of it, you surprise yourself, and it looks good. I have to say, though, that there's a big difference between how the original art looks and how it comes across in print. Dorman's stuff *always* prints well; he just keeps doing something right—and it doesn't hurt that he happens to be a great artist."

Like many neophyte artists, Nelson got his start in high school, painting for friends, and started stretching himself artistically while his classmates were learning the basics.

"When I went to college, there were people who hadn't done much, while I had been working on my stuff for years," he says. "If someone were to ask me for advice, I would tell them to *practice*. Work on your stuff, try different things. Don't just read comics and copy what you see there, because then you're not going to create *anything* original; you're just doing second-hand 'hot artist' stuff. Study some of the really great artists, and not just comic guys. Look at an anatomy book. Then, study what you did and try to figure out what you've done right and wrong. Doing it helps young artists much more than a few tips from a pro glancing over their portfolios at a con."

In the meantime, Nelson admits that he's having a blast turning his purple demon loose on New York. "I sometimes think that I'm having more fun making it than anyone could have reading it," he confesses, "but it has been great having the chance to do this book. I think the fun shows—and now we're setting the stage for some big happenings. After I finish the next few covers I'm working on, there's tons of stuff ready to go in *Eudaemon*." CS

Hamill

(continued from page 29)

compliment," he confesses, rather more than happily. But it wasn't Hamill's dedication to Batman as a comic book character that earned him his chance at giving children nightmares. After playing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart on tour for a year in *Amadeus*, he perfected a high-pitched, annoying laugh that he utilized when auditioning for the smiling villain.

"Apparently," he says, "that's what got me the part, the laugh. One thing that's great about doing the character is he's just such a rich loony."

Batman: Mask of the Phantasm (now on video) gave Hamill another chance to spread his wings as the Clown Prince of Crime. "They pretty much handled the Joker origin in the Tim Burton movie, but in our continuity, the Joker did *not* kill Dr. and Mrs. Wayne—that was purely an invention of the movies," he says. "*Mask of the Phantasm* is our take on Batman's origin. My Joker is anything but subtle, so when he appears halfway through the movie, he's much like the Genie in *Aladdin*—he's just a burst of energy!"

After finishing 13 episodes of the series as the grinning baddie, Hamill is still incredulous about the types of restrictions his character must accommodate, right down to the inability to say "killed" on an animated show. "So you're the man who *iced* Batman," he notes. The mildly homicidal voice begins again, "So you're the man who *whacked* Batman." Within the same breath Hamill has returned: "Whack? A Mafia term is acceptable in place of 'killed'?"

Hamill's biggest regret in voicing the Joker is that he hasn't been able to do it enough. He's happy, though, that Hollywood has finally done it right.

"*Batman* has been a dream come true," he says. "For writers, they *finally* got people who have written comic books as a livelihood to work on the show. When TV producers buy *Wonder Woman*, they usually hire a couple of *Hawaii Five-O* writers! And now, I think for the first time in an animated series, they have people with comic book backgrounds. You wouldn't think it's that unusual, but it is.

"What they've done with this series is about as much as we comics fans can hope for," Mark Hamill says, "and I think it's setting a trend. They're about to do *Spider-Man*, and *Batman* is the standard against which everything else is judged, and that's good for us because there's a copycat mentality in Hollywood. Isn't it better for them to copy the *good* stuff?" CS

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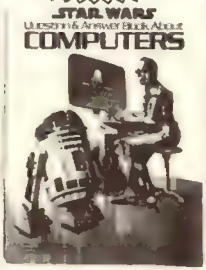

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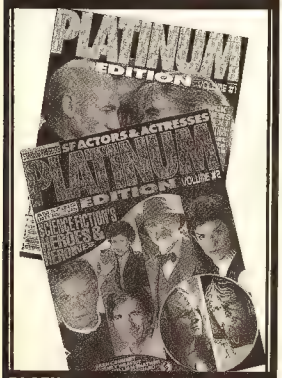

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Maximortal

(continued from page 39)

to give it form visually. And before you know it, we had this whole imaginary line of comics from the '60s.

"One of the things Alan asked us to do was to approach the art the way Marvel comics probably really were drawn in the '60s, which was to do two to three pages a day, complete, which is a *lot* of work. Either it's a lot of work or you have to find many shortcuts. We did it. It was amazing. In a week, we would have a book done. It was great, seeing it come together so quickly.

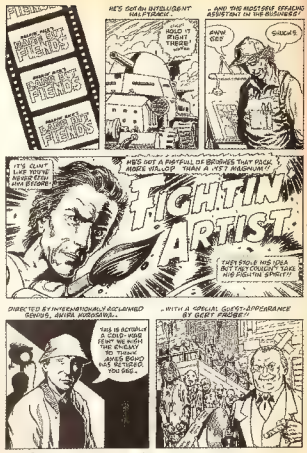
"A lot of the fun, even on the production end, was designing the package so that it looked and tasted and *smelled* just like those old pulpy comics. The dot patterns were big, just like in the '60s. We spent a lot of time replicating the tactile feel and look of the books.

"Dreams are very much an art form that we all create," states Veitch. "We all share in it."

"The best part of it was that the book sold like hotcakes, and we all did really well—well enough so that we can go off and work on the projects that really mean a great deal to us now. We don't have to make a living doing commercial comics for a while."

In fact, Moore, Bissette and Veitch are already brainstorming a post-*1963* project, of which Veitch will say no more than, "It's something a bit larger than *1963*, and a bit more modern."

Then, there's the oft-mentioned *Hellhead* graphic novel, co-written by Veitch and John Totleben, and painted by Totleben. "Probably 25 pages are complete at this point," Veitch explains. "It's absolutely knockout stuff. John has really outdone himself with this painted work. It's like he has reinvented painted superhero comics. It might take a couple of years before people see it, though, because work on it has been agonizingly slow due to all the detail he's putting into it.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"What's interesting about *Rare Bit Fiends* is that I try to offer representations of the serial phenomena of dreaming," says Veitch.

"The story involves two characters, in the modern age. The Scourge is a cross between Batman and Iron Man. Runamok is like the Hulk to the nth degree. They're having this battle, in Sodom City, literally tearing the city to its foundations. Runamok really does a number on the Scourge, to the point where the Scourge is almost dead. He has a near-death experience and begins to meet people from his past. That begins a series of flashbacks that define who he was, and who Runamok was in the earlier decades of their life, going back to the '30s. By the time you get back to the '30s and the '40s, the Scourge is a character like the Spirit and Runamok is his chauffeur or sidekick. And how they got from that point to the completely over-the-top point that they're in now is what the story is all about."

Rick Veitch confesses, "I'm a sucker for comics on a nostalgic level. I grew up loving comics, reading them and creating many of them from the time I was a little kid, using comics as my own means of self-expression. I lived comics very organically; it was a real part of my life. And I love all that stuff.

"When you look at the things I did in the *1963* series, instead of the cynical, dark, satirical approach, it's the completely in-love-with, happy, fun-fun approach of superhero comics in their purest form. I tend to see the King Hell stuff as a more pointed satirical tool to make people look at these things much closer, or to break through the simple entertainment value that most people associate with these types of comics."

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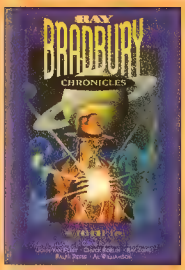

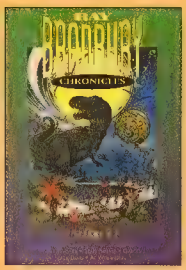

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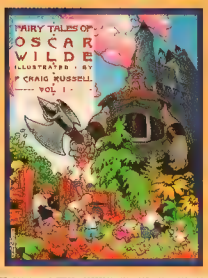

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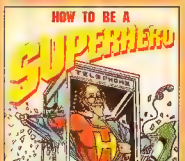

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A certain mouse visits a land of giants in *Mickey and the Beanstalk*.

Animation, First Prize: "Musical Max," by Weston Woods Studios, Inc.: Virginia Wilkos, Ty Varszegi.

Direction, First Prize: "Mr. Morton," by J.J. Sedelmaier and Tom Yohe, Jr.

Anyone can enter the festival but only members can vote. In addition to New Yorkers, ASIFA-East members include folks from Boston and the Rhode Island School of Design. Members also enjoy monthly screenings and the newsletter, *ANYMATOR*. For more information, contact Linda Simensky, President, ASIFA-East, 470 W. 24th Street, #15A, New York, NY 10011.

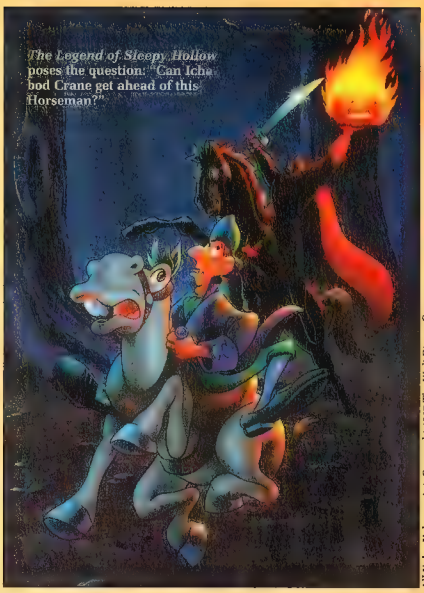
New on Home Video: *The Fox and the Hound*, Disney's 24th full-length feature, was released March 4. Based on the book by Daniel P. Mannix, the story focuses on two friends who don't know they're natural enemies: a mischievous fox, Tod (voiced by Keith Mitchell as a cub, Mickey Rooney as an adult) and a playful bloodhound, Copper (Corey Feldman as a pup, Kurt Russell as an adult). Their friendship is tested as they grow older, as Copper's cantankerous owner, Amos Slade (Jack Albertson), sends Copper to track down the fox. Pearl Bailey voices Big Mama, a matronly owl who helps Tod in his philosophical and romantic entanglements.

First released in 1981, the 83-minute film grossed $40 million, adding $23 million in its 1988 re-release. It served as a transitional film for the studio, as it blended the talents of two of Disney's "Nine Old Men," Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (STARLOG #122-3), with the younger generation of animators honing their skills for Disney's later mega-hits. Glen Keane, who choreographed the climactic bear fight sequence, also animated the Little Mermaid, the Beast and Aladdin (CS#22). Other key animators: John Musker and Ron Clements (directors of *Aladdin*), John Lasseter (director, PIXAR's Oscar-winning *Tin Toy*), Darrell Van Citters (director, "Box Office Bunny") and Jerry Rees (director, *The Brave Little Toaster*). Richard Rich (now directing *The Swan Princess*), Art Stevens and Ted Berman directed *The Fox & the Hound*.

The digitally remastered video, available on both VHS and Beta, retails for $24. A video and plush pack, which includes a plush toy of Copper the pup, is $29.99. There are no current plans for a laserdisc release.

Pooh is in the forest: Walt Disney Home Video is celebrating the 70th anniversary of A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh with three video collections.

"Pooh Storybook Classics" came out in January. These are the four original animated adaptations, all 25 minutes in length: *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree* (1966), *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day* (1968, Oscar-winner for Best Cartoon Short Subject. This was the final animated production Walt Disney approved before his death), *Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too* (1974) and one produced by Rick Reinert Productions, *Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore* (1983).



All Video Volumes Art: Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company

"Pooh Playtime" is a set of three volumes containing three episodes each from the TV series: "Cowboy Pooh," "Detective Tigger" and "Pooh Party," released in February at $12.99 per volume, at 46, 52 and 46 minutes respectively.

"Pooh Learning" debuts May 6 with three cassettes: "Sharing and Caring" (three TV episodes), "Making Friends" (four episodes) and "Helping Others" (four episodes) at 45, 40 and 45 minutes respectively. These contain a different set of nine flashcards.

Disney's "Favorite Stories": This is a collection of four Disney featurettes released January 28 on video, each priced at $12.99. The titles are: *The Prince & the Pauper* (1990, 33 minutes), *Mickey & the Beanstalk* (1947, 29 minutes. Originally part of *Fun and Fancy Free*), *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1949, 33 minutes. Originally part of *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*) and *Peter and the Wolf* (1946, 30 minutes. Originally part of *Make Mine Music*. This volume also includes *Music Land* and *Symphony Hour*). An illustrated storybook is included with each video.

When *The Prince and the Pauper* was shown theatrically with *Rescuers Down Under*, the end credits whizzed past faster than those for *Rescuers*. On the home video, the credits appear to move at a slower, more readable pace. At least, you can freeze-frame them to learn of the many talented artists who contributed to the film.

—Bob Miller

Video allows a chance for fans to slow down and actually read the credits of Disney's *The Prince and The Pauper*.

DC COMICS COLLECTIBLES

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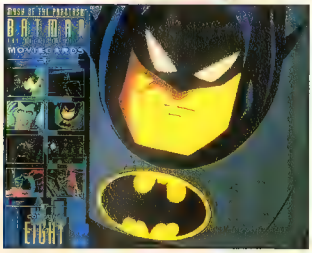

2.

Also available is ***BATMAN*: MASK OF THE *PHANTASM* - THE ANIMATED MOVIE Moviecard Portfolio** containing exciting scenes from the new full-length animated film. ***The Dark Knight*** in action; ***Phantasm***, ***Batman***'s newest and mysterious foe; and the return of the maniacal ***Joker*** are a few of the highlights included in this collection.

3.

4.

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COMICS screen

COMICS REPORTER

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; L: Largo; QDE: Quincy Davis Entertainment. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 4/1/94)

The Airtight Garage. AN. EP: Kurosawa Ent. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Katsuhiro Otomo. S: Randy Lofficier.

Aladdin. AN series & video sequel, *The Return of Jafar.*

Alfred E. Neuman. Film. P: Steven Haft, QDE.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

Annie. Film. Rastar.

Archie. Film. DIC.

The Badger. Film/TV. PP.

Barbarella. Film. Nel.

Baby Huey. AN. Syn TV. Harvey via Claster TV. For fall.

❑ **Batman III.** Sequel. D: Joel Schumacher. S: Lee & Janet Batchler. Shoots Sept.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck.

Blade. Film.

Blankman. Film. W/ Damon Wayans. D: Mike Binder. Sony. Summer release.

Blondie. Film. WB.

Broom Hilda. Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Casper. Film. Am/U. D: Brad Silberling. S: Sherri Stoner, Deanna Oliver. W/C. Ricci.

Catwoman. Film. WB. S: Dan Waters.

Charlie Chan. D: M. Mann.

Concrete. Film. DH. S: Larry Wilson, Paul Chadwick.

❑ **The Crow.** Film. Miramax. (see article)

Crying Freeman. Film. D: C. Gans. P: Brian Yuzna.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

Dr. Strange. Film. Savoy.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Double Dragon. Film.

Duckman. AN series. USA.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film.

❑ **Fantastic Four.** AN series. Genesis Ent. Film. Fox.

Fat Albert. Film.

Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

Felix the Cat. AN. Film Roman.

Flaming Carrot. Film.

❑ **The Flintstones.** Film. U/Am. (see article)

Ghost Rider. Film.

G.I. Joe. Film. P: Larry Kasanoff.

❑ **The Green Hornet.** Film. S: Caleb Carr. U.

Hate. Film. S: Peter Bagge.

Incredible Hulk. Film. U.

Inspector Gadget. Film. S: J. Loeb III, M. Weisman. U.

Iron Man. AN series. Genesis Ent.

Judge Dredd. Film. Sylvester Stallone. S: Bill Wisher. D: Danny Cannon. Shoots in June.

Kull. Film. U. S: C. Pogue.

Li'l Abner. Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Lt. Blueberry. Film. P: Eclectic Films.

❑ **The Lion King.** AN film. WD. June release.

❑ **The Mantis.** TV series. Fox Fall.

❑ **The Mask.** Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell. July.

Mega Man. AN series. Ruby-Spears.

The Men in Black. Film. Col.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

Pagemaster. AN/LA film. D: Joe Johnston. Fox/HB. X-Mas.

Peanuts. Film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

The Phantom. Film. PP. AN series: *Phantom 2040.* Hearst Ent. Debuts fall.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilson. D: Bryan Spicer.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD.

Prince Valiant. Film. S: M. Beckner, Roger Kumble, Marlene King. N. Constantin.

The Pulse. Film. QDE.

The Phantom gets animated in a new series set in 2040.

Phantom Character: Copyright 1994 King Features

Reid Fleming. Film. WB.

Richie Rich. Film. P: Joel Silver, J. Davis. D: Don Petrie. W/Macaulay Culkin.

The Saint. Film. PP.

Sandman. Film.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. S/D: John Milius. WB.

❑ **The Shadow.** Film. W/Alec Baldwin. (see article).

Sheena. TV series. P: Paul Aratow. Col.

The Simpsons. AN series.

Sin City. S: Frank Miller.

Speed Racer. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: J.F. Lawton. WB.

Spider-Man. AN TV mini-series. Fox. Daily TV series later. LA Film. S: Jim Cameron (D), Neil Ruttenberg. Summer '95.

Spy vs. Spy. Film. S: Gene Quintano. P: Steven Tisch, QDE.

Stealth Force. Film. Kandoo.

Superman. TV series. ABC.

Tank Girl. Film. D: Rachel Talalay. S: Tedi Sarafian. P: Trilogy Ent. UA.

Terry & the Pirates. TV series. 22 episodes. P: Ben Melniker, Michael Uslan, Robert Rehme, Mace Neufeld, RSC Films.

Time Cop. Film. D: Peter Hyams. S: Mark Verheiden. DH/L. U. W/Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

V for Vendetta. Film. S: Hilary Henkin. D: Brett Leonard. P: Joel Silver.

Virus. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. P: Gale Anne Hurd. U.

X-Men. Film. Fox. P: Lauren Shuler-Donner. S: Andrew Kevin Walker.

Youngblood. AN series.

Zen. Film. AN series.

Zorro. Film. S: Kathleen King. D: Mikael Salomon. TriStar. AN TV series. Imagination F. Calico.

***The Badger* will go wild on screen. Paramount has acquired film-TV rights.**

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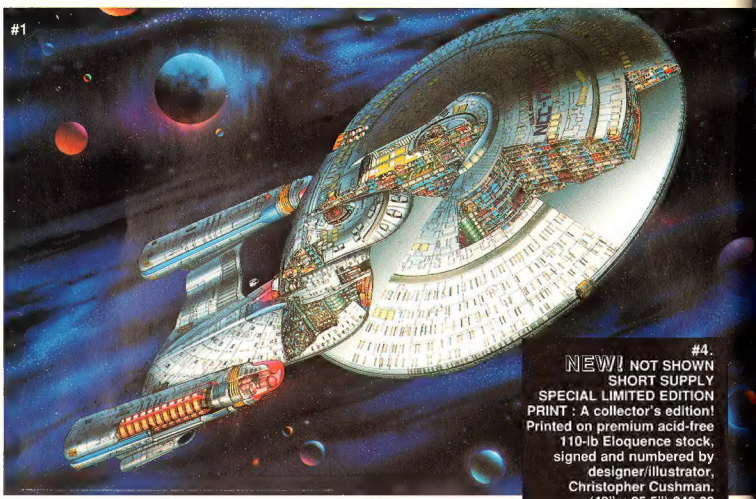

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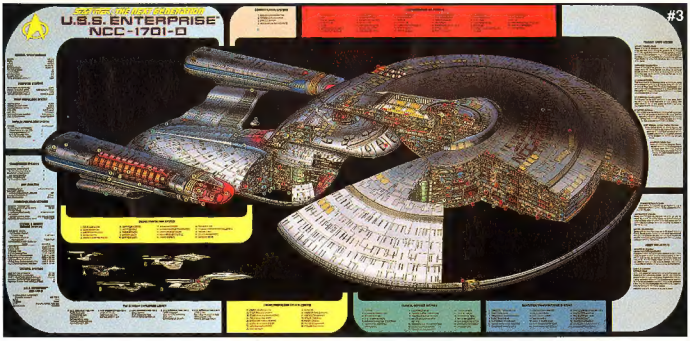

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